Harunohi Biyori
春の日びより
illust. ひたきゆう
乙女ゲームのヒロインで
—otome game no heroine de saikyo survival—
最強サバイバルVI
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Illustrations

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TOブックス

フェルド

お人好しな凄腕冒険者。幼いアリアに最初に戦闘スキルを教えた人物。

ヴィーロ

冒険者。凄腕斥候。アリアを気に入り、暗部騎士のセラに引き合わせた。

セラ

メルローズ辺境伯直属、暗部の上級騎士（戦闘侍女）。アリアを戦闘メイドとして鍛えた。

サマンサ

凄腕魔導士。『虹色の剣』創始者の一人。どこまでボケているのかは不明。

アーリシア（偽ヒロイン）

乙女ゲームの知識を得た元孤児。本来アリアが担うはずだった"乙女ゲームのヒロイン"という立場に収まり、魔術学園にて暗躍している。

アリア（本名:アーリシア・メルローズ）

本作の主人公。乙女ゲーム『銀の翼に恋をする』の本来のヒロイン。転生者に殺されかけた事で「知識」を得た。生き抜くためであれば、殺しも厭わない。

エレーナ

クレイデール王国の第一王女。乙女ゲームの悪役令嬢だが、アリアにとっては同志のような存在。誇り高く、友情に熱い。

クララ

ダンドール辺境伯直系の姫であり転生者。乙女ゲームの悪役令嬢の一人。アリアを警戒している。

カルラ

レスター伯爵家の令嬢。乙女ゲームにおける最凶最悪の悪役令嬢。アリアと殺し合いたいと考えている。

Prologue – Grudge

「……aaAAA! GOSTOURAAAA!」

At the west of Thurs continent──inside an old castle where sunlight didn't reach, a girl was wailing.

In front of the girl was a single man……or his corpse in any case.

What appeared in front of the girl wasn't the smiling face of the man returning with dozen of their clan members to report the success of their mission, but just a single unspeaking corpse of Gostoura, the clan head's aide who was also her irreplaceable friend.

「Why……whyyy!」

The girl wailed. Tears of blood even escaped her eyes because of her heightened emotion.

In the past, the dark elves were persecuted by the holy church that accused them as the messenger of the evil god. The church drove them away toward the dangerous region where a lot of monsters were rampant. Then they called themselves with the depreciatory title of [Evil Race] and went into war with other races numerous time. Those wars greatly reduced their number.

Evil race country, vampire clan. The dark elves who found that their population had been greatly reduced were forced to welcome monsters, those who had even stopped being "human" as countryman. With that vampires who had lived until then by slinking in the darkness could finally obtain dignity as human.

But, even if they were formerly the same dark elf, human and monster wouldn't be able to understand each other in the truest meaning.

Predator and prey……the vampire clan was constantly being treated with wariness by their fellow evil race. They didn't know when their own allies would move to remove them. In such situation, the vampire race had to show proof that they were a legitimate member of the evil country even if they had to bleed for it.

In the place of the girl who was the clan head, her aide Gostoura led the clan's veterans to carry out a dangerous mission, infiltrating a human country.

A report that reached her several months ago mentioned that they would be able to cause unrest inside Claydale Kingdom and reduced its national strength by kidnapping its princess alive.

But……what came back was only Gostoura's unspeaking corpse…….

The girl who was the clan head understood that not only their plan was foiled, she even lost her fellow clan member and friend Gostoura who had accompanied her for many years.

「……Those damned humans, unforgivable-!」

The girl let out a voice that was filled with resentment. She bared her fang to the dead body of her friend Gostoura.

Vampire obtained the power of soul of living creature by sucking their blood. But, the blood of the dead gave them nothing. But, a vampire with strength above certain level could obtain the thought of the dead through their blood.

「Aa……」

The "blood" memory flowed in……. An impression was especially strong inside that memory……the image of the person that the dead resented was strongly burned into the girl's brain.

「……It's you guys. You guys were the ones, who killed my clan members and Gostoura!!」

Claws made from blood lengthened. Blood trickled when her fangs gnawed on her lip.

「…….Black haired woman……and, pink haired woman-! Unforgivable……tsu. I swear I will give you two eternal suffering and show you hell no matter what!!」

.

It was now difficult for the vampire clan that had lost many of their powerful members to continue its survival. Monsters that couldn't be counted on as fighting strength was nothing more than a nuisance. Even so the clan's survival might still be possible if the girl who was the clan head fought at the forefront.

But, the girl didn't choose that. The clan had already lost its meaning for the girl. And so she chose to take revenge for the people who had been together with her for hundreds of years rather than the clan's survival.

The girl wanted to head to Claydale Kingdom and took revenge for her friend even if she had to do it alone. But, there was also a reason why she couldn't do that.

A vampire turned their skill when they were still alive and the years they had lived into their strength. The stronger they became, the more monstrous they became spiritually. In such state, living in a human city wouldn't be an easy thing because of the great restrictions that were put on them, just like with Gostoura and his men. Even if she headed to Claydale Kingdom in such state, it would be almost impossible to search for those two women when she was alone and couldn't move during the day.

But she wouldn't give up. In order to kill the two women who killed her friend and her clan's future, the girl planned to smoke them out using a method that was realistic as well the most unrealistic.

Large war with human country hadn’t broke out since more than fifty years ago. Human race thought that evil race had no strength left to fight, but the evil race still hadn’t given up. For the human race, the war was a history that happened more than two generations ago, but for the dark elves with their long lifespan, it was just a short time that they couldn’t possibly forget.

They were increasing their decreased population, gathered weapons, spread out the members of various clans like the vampire clan all over the continent, sowing the seeds of discord.

And, even now the hardliners of evil race were begging to restart the war again. The current evil race’s king was completely cowardly as though his severeness in the past was just a lie, but if the girl who was the vampire clan’s head didn’t care of what method to use, even winning over the peaceful faction was possible.

She would start the war anew. Using the evil race army, she would crush human settlements. Until that calamity reached those two women, even if she had spent dozens of years for it…….

Even if she herself got worked to death and perish in the process of it.

She would spread destruction until warriors with strength that could defeat Gostoura had no choice but to head to the battlefield.

The girl laughed in the darkness while tears of blood trickled down her face.

「──Thousand curses for the human race──!!」

Desert Town

The Royal Sorcery Academy was the place where the sons and daughters of important nobles in Claydale Kingdom were gathered. It should be a place with great security and safeness. And yet such place was attacked and Elena Claydale, the first princess ended up missing.

From the eyewitness testimony, the perpetrator was thought to be a part of the dark elves who were called as the evil race, people who were at war with human race more than fifty years ago, but they were defeated by the princess's bodyguard and their body were left outside. When morning came, the sunlight turned those corpses into ash, so the royal sorcerers and palace doctors investigated the corpses that were left inside the building. The result showed that they were vampires.

Was it an act of terrorism by evil race, or an attack by monsters called vampire? Assumption that perhaps the princess had died was whispered among a part of the people who weren't in the princess's faction, but the heavily injured aide and servants of the princess were giving testimony that such wasn't the case.

It came to light that the objective of the main culprit, the evil race was the abduction of Princess Elena.

To carry out that objective, the attackers used a [Gem] that was obtained from dungeon. They tried to use the [Teleport] sorcery that was sealed inside that Gem to whisk away the princess.

However, the moment the sorcery was activated, the baron daughter who was an adventurer serving as the princess's personal bodyguard defeated the leader of the evil race attackers and successfully prevented the worst case of the princess's abduction by the evil race.

But, the princess and her bodyguard the baron daughter were dragged into the already activated Teleport and vanished to the unknown.

According to the analysis of the elite royal sorcerers, the two were most likely somewhere between Claydale Kingdom and the Teleport's destination……the distance would change depending on the amount of mana sealed inside the Gem, but they hypothesized that the two *fell* somewhere in the middle.

They also used sorcery to question the aide and bodyguard knights and investigate, but there was no discrepancy in their testimonies. Because of that the kingdom's policy changed from investigating evil race to searching the princess.

Regardless of the situation, if it became known that the princess went missing, it was unknown how a part of the noble faction that was starting to leaning toward the royal faction would act. Fortunately the headmaster already gave the gag order inside the academy so that the information wouldn't trickle down to the students. The king ordered the academy to give the students a vacation for three months to half a year in order to reinforce the academy's security. The prime minister also ordered the investigation department that included the black ops to search for the princess inside and outside the country.

The princess was alive. Many people believed that. Even so they would only be able to stop the information of her disappearance to spread for three months. That would be the limit.

In case the princess's safety was still unclear even after three months, the king decided that he would announce that the princess was in the middle of recuperation in order to avoid chaos, stop the behind the scene judging of the princess and the crown princess of who would be the most suitable for the throne, and half a year later he would arrange to make it looked like the princess died because of sickness, and at the same time officially announce the crown prince Ervan as the his successor to be the next king.

The time limit was half a year. During that time there were people who started taking action to do what they could.

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Inside an office in the palace, the prime minister, Margrave Belt Melrose ordered the black ops knights in charge of intelligence to search the princess. At the same time he started investigating the identity of noble who led the evil race into the country.

「Belt-sama, you are thinking that it was a noble house of this country that led the evil race inside?」

「That's right. Even if there is a traitor, they won't be able to know any information about the academy security unless they're a noble. But that doesn't mean that it's definitely a noble. After all the older a noble is, the greater their resentment toward evil race.」

Belt was still a young man during the previous war, even so the evil race's strength and their cruelness in fighting had been burned into his memory along with the feeling of terror.

The noble house heads and old people who lived in the previous era were still unable to forget it. And so the possibility was high that it wasn't noble house but an individual who sheltered the evil race members inside this country. Furthermore that individual might be still young.

Belt's personal butler Oz nodded quietly while listening to his master's story. At the same time he was brewing a new pot of tea for his master.

「The one who invited them in and the one who sheltered them also might not be the same person. I will notify the investigators about that possibility too. Also, about the search for her highness, what should we do about the search abroad? I believe that the possibility is higher that they are outside this country if they got dragged into Teleport.」

「The head of royal sorcerer believe that such possibility is indeed high. We can't publicly search in other countries but, her highness is a capable person. Besides she also has *that person* with her. Most likely they'll be attempting to make their way here. It's fine even if it's just a rumor, investigate everything without leaving any stone unturned.」

「……As you command.」

Oz guessed a certain thought that his master Belt was having and bowed his head. And then he immediately left the office.

.

「……」

Belt leaned deeply on the back of his chair. There was a small creaking sound while he let out a small sigh and looked up to empty air. He recalled the figure of a girl.

His thought was turned toward the memento of his departed daughter. Not the girl who was found several years ago and introduced herself as his granddaughter, but the adventurer girl who went missing together with the princess.

Even after she became an adopted daughter of Sera who was a black ops knight, the princess's restriction over her was strict that any noble who wasn't a staff of the academy couldn't approach the girl, but Belt managed to catch a glimpse of that girl just once when she was accompanying the princess as her bodyguard. Even now her image was strongly burned into Belt's eyes.

Blonde hair with pinkish tinge that looked like it was shining. That color and also her expression that she showed just for an instant were enough for him to see the shade of his dead daughter in her.

Her age also matched. She also had the look. But there was no proof. Unlike that girl who only had circumstantial evidence as his granddaughter, there was no circumstantial evidence at all to support his belief that the princess's bodyguard was his granddaughter.

He wondered how much hardship she had gone through to obtain such strength in that age. But, that girl at present became the princess's bodyguard solely due to her strength. If Belt carelessly tried something with

her, there was even a possibility that the girl who was an adventurer would easily vanish to somewhere.

The disappearance of that girl together with the princess was fanning his anxiety. Until now he was planning to gather evidence before the two girls became of age, but perhaps by any chance he wouldn't be able to meet that girl anymore just like what happened with his departed daughter.

(……No, that girl is alive.)

The princess also had luck on her side, but they should also be able to survive even in foreign country considering the strength of that girl.

He would find that girl along with the princess no matter what. And then this time for sure he wouldn't make the same mistake like what he did with his departed daughter. He decided that he would even use his personal wealth for the search so he could meet again with the girl who might be his actual granddaughter.

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And then a certain girls started moving when she received a report that the princess went missing together with her bodyguard.

Lady Clara Dandall, the daughter of Margrave Dandall. The main fiancée of crown prince Ervan, a noble daughter whose health was failing after obtaining the Gift of dungeon for the sake of the royal family.

「Er-sama……」

But, when was the last time her fiancée came to visit her?

Ervan was a kind young man due to his weakness of not possessing a cold-heartedness befitting as a member of a royal family. It was that kindness that touched Clara's heart. It made her loved him not only as a capture target from the otome game, but also as a man. But Clara's complexion was bad right now wasn't solely caused by Ervan's heart becoming

progressively distant from her. The disappearance of Princess Elena also played a part in it.

The one who led the evil race into the kingdom was Carla, the same like in the otome game's scenario, but it was Grave who gave them a base after Carla abandoned them, while Clara was the one providing them with information and fund.

Even without any contact with Grave, Clara was able to predict the objective of the evil race to a certain degree using her future calculation that was based on her knowledge of the game script and her Gift.

Attack to the royal family and the decline of the kingdom because of that. The attack toward the crown prince Ervan and princess Elena.

But it was something that should happen quite far in the future. The event of evil race's attack should only be triggered when the positivity levels of multiple capture targets toward the heroine were crossing a certain amount. Clara too thought that the evil race's attack would happen at the second year or later.

Even then Clara gave support to the evil race was to start a special event that could occur in the second year.

The kidnapping of the heroine by the evil race──.

This was an event that could only occur in the second playthrough after clearing the main scenario once. The heroine who had cleared the darkness inside the hearts of the capture targets got captured by evil race so that the capture targets would feel unrest.

But, the capture targets who had high positivity level toward the heroine and had grown up mentally would head to the evil race country, where they would combine their strength and took back the heroine.

That was why Clara tried to start that event forcefully.

Even if the positivity levels of the capture targets toward the heroine had become high, the kidnapping of just a single low rank noble daughter wouldn't cause the kingdom to take serious action. Ervan and the other capture targets also wouldn't be able to move because in reality they didn't have any strength that would enable them to do anything by themselves. In the end it would only be their positivity levels that were high, but in realityit would be impossible for them to go rescue the heroine from enemy country on their own.

But, that event had started now, in the first year.

Furthermore, it wasn't the crown prince Ervan or the heroine that the evil race regarded as danger, but Princess Elena who was starting to show her true capability that she was originally hiding.

Elena made a wish to a dungeon's spirit to heal her body and then she began to show her talent. It caused the evil race to regard her as more dangerous than the crown prince Ervan or the heroine.

When Clara was still a child who hadn't remembered her previous life…… she thought of Elena as her real sister. When she recalled that feeling, the fact that she was the cause of Elena almost losing her life made her felt like vomiting.

But, the current situation was the perfect chance for Clara.

The academy students were getting sent home, but a part of the influential nobles and powerful noble houses that knew the truth were remaining inside the academy. If it was just the high class noble houses and their staffs, the royal guards would be able to give them protection when they were gathered in one spot. That would be safer rather than carelessly travelling back to their territory. The royal family notified the high class nobles in the royal family of such option and they chose to remain in the academy. There was also suggestion that at least the royalties and the fiancées should stay in the palace, but Clara and Carla wished to stay in the academy so that talk wasn't brought up anymore.

With Elena and that terrifying girl gone, even Clara who was mentally tormented by their existence would become able to move freely.

Clara swore to herself that she would take back Ervan's heart even if she had to use her [Gift] to peek at all the available choices for the future.

Until now she had relied on other people without doing anything herself even though she was cursing the heroine's existence.

That was why this time for sure──

「I'll get rid of the heroine.」

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While a girl was making such decision, Alicia……the girl who called herself Alicia was enjoying tea with three males elegantly.

「You're really kind Licia. You're concerned not only for Elena, but even for that kind of boorish person……」

「How can that be……it's Amor-sama who is kind. You're concerned even for someone like me.」

Licia's cheeks reddened as she smiled sweetly toward the words of the king's brother Amor. Then the boy who was sitting at the opposite side of Amor leaned forward to draw Licia's attention.

「That bodyguard was a savage girl. The princess was also a cold person, but it was because that girl was someone who took other people's life so easily that she met that kind of experience.」

「Please don't say something like that, Nathanital. Not everyone can have a beautiful heart like you.」

「I-is that so? I'm sorry, Licia.」

Nathanital smiled shyly. Alicia smiled brightly at him like a child. The two who were used to the fake smile of noble daughters felt that such smile was

fresh. To them she looked like the symbol of purity.

The two had their original sense of value destroyed by the pink haired girl, even so their stubborn mind couldn't accept it. But then the two traumatized males met Alicia who completely accepted and approved of them as they were.

She wouldn't get too close but also not too far away from them. She would gently hold their hand when they needed it. They also didn't harbor any wariness toward her due to her childish look. And so Alicia's existence was driven into their heart like a stake by her complete acceptance of them.

「……」

Ervan was watching the two of them who were like that with a conflicted expression.

He was worried for Elena, her sister from a different mother who went missing. Elena had grown distant from him as they grew older, but for him who only had the way of thinking like a middle ranked noble, Elena was just his cute little sister no matter what. He was unable to change his feeling for her easily like Amor and Nathanital.

Amor should be an uncle who was cherishing Elena before this, but did he have no more familial love for her like Ervan? Nathanital was a boy who was faithful to the teaching of god and hated murder to that degree, and yet to Ervan now he looked like he was rejoicing from other people's misfortune.

Nobody gave any rebuke to them. And there was a single girl who was giving her approval to their feeling.

Was it really fine for them to be like this? Was Alicia……Licia really correct?

It seemed that Elena wasn't thinking well about Licia. Clara too was telling him that she was dangerous.

(……I haven't seen Clara lately. Since when……? I want to take just a bit of distance from her because she was gradually tying me down……but, Clara did that for my sake……I too……)

「──Er-sama?」

「Licia……」

Alicia's voice called out while Ervan was deep in thought. She gently wrapped his hand in her hand under the table. Her warmth pulled him back into reality.

「Don't force yourself……Er-sama isn't wrong. You're just a little bit tired, so surely things will go well after you rest for a bit.」

「Yeah. You……are right.」

He didn't agree. But her words gave a pleasant "escape" to him who was suffering from the crown prince responsibility and problem. Ervan gently held her hand back.

「Fufu」

Licia was displaying the most perfect adorable sile to the men who harbored darkness in their heart.

She loved everything they were. But that love was nothing more than the other side of her self-love just so she was loved. That was exactly why the men felt she loved them in particular more than anyone else.

Licia's purpose was "to be loved".

Only being loved by everyone could satisfy the "hunger" of her heart. If it was for the sake to be loved, she could even do this tightrope performance that was just a hair's breadth shy of being lese majeste. Even if it would cost her life…….

If it could satisfy this "hunger", she would pay even if the cost was this country's destruction.

Her growing environment when she was little with nobody loving her where she had nothing and lived in loneliness and terror, was changing a mere girl that had no power at all into a country toppling seductress.

Today too the girl who called herself Licia was wearing a wide smile that only loved herself from her heart.

.

There was a girl who was genuinely having fun watching those four.

The daughter of the head of the royal sorcerers, Carla woke up two days after the princess went missing. When she heard about the situation from her servant, she rolled on the floor laughing so hard that her stamina got halved.

「……You're really entertaining, Aria. But come back quickly okay. If you don't return, I'll burn him, her, everyone.」

It wasn't just the academy and nobility that acted. The adventurer party Rainbow Sword including the healed Viro accepted a quest from the prime minister once more to search the princess and their comrade and started moving. For the sake of the girl who was its partner, the mythical beast Coeurl, Nero was sprinting toward the place where the girl's master was living. It knew the location because it had went there once with the girl.

The princess was alive. The closer someone was to the princess, the more they believed that. That was because they knew that girl……Aria was with her.

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At the southwest region of Thurs continent, there was a land of sand that rejected any living creature called the desert of death, and a huge ancient ruins located adjacent to it.

There was no one who knew in which era that ruins came from. It was considered as a remain of an ethnic group that preceded even the Cruz

people who were the indigenous people of this continent. It was a ruins of a city that was as big as a small country. The sandstorm made the city looked misty, so that ancient ruins city became called as [Resvel].

There was no human in that ancient ruins city. That was because that ruins was overflowing with shelled insect monsters that lived in the desert, and undead monsters like lich or skeleton.

But, where there were monsters there were materials and magic stone that could be collected. Adventurers would gather if those things could be obtained.

There were also people coming for excavation because they were dreaming to find treasures that were remaining in the ruins. If such people gathered, merchants who sniffed the smell of money would also gather. Those people then gradually formed a settlement.

“People” lived in place that had greed.

There was a town in the middle of the desert. That town was located at half a day of walking from the outer circumference of the ancient ruins Resvel. People from various races were crowding that town.

Human, beastman, dwarf, elf. Adventurer, grave robber, criminal, wanted man……their past had no meaning. Anyone strong had the qualification to live in this town. The weak would become corpse inside the dry sand of the desert.

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Zari……

Leather boot made a slight sound on the stone floor that was covered with sand.

The location wasn’t even inside the town. It was the slum that was outside the wall……there was a ramshackle bar in a corner of such place. Men with blackish skin were drinking alcohol on a stone table while the day was still

bright. They turned a dangerous gaze toward a duo that stepped inside the bar.

It wasn't rare for someone to wear a cloak in this area because of the strong sunlight, but the men saw through the cover that they were young women from their body built and gait. They sported a slightly vulgar smile.

While the men were unreservedly staring, the two women walked until the counter where the bar owner was standing. Then the taller woman placed several small silver coins on the counter.

「Two meals and drinks without alcohol.」

The voice wasn't high or low pitched, but the youngness in it surprised the bar owner. He frowned just a little seeing the silver coins on the counter.

「Which country's currency are these? Don't show this kinda thing at the open.」

「It's unusable?」

「That ain't it……. Listen lass.」

The bar owner stroked his stubble with an annoyed look, then he put his elbow on the counter, leaned forward, and lowered his voice.

「You two are foreigners right? D'you think young woman from outside can stay safe in this kinda place? There ain't anything fancy like town guard in this town. You better beat it──」

「Oi oi, don't run off your mouth like that.」

Someone interrupted them. The four men who were drinking alcohol inside the bar were standing behind the women with vulgar smile.

「To go outside the wall like this, you traveler? Or a merchant who only came here recently? Anyone familiar with this town ain't gonna bring young woman here, and none'll dare to go outside the wall y'know.」

「You two are in luck. Anyone other than us will already strip off everything you got and turn you into pig food the next day yeah?」

「Though it'll depend on your look whether anyone will buy you even if you're a woman!」

The drunk men were prattling worthless things while cackling.

Blackish skin……they were Cruz people who lived in the desert. Most likely they were residents of the town.

「……Is this something usual around this area?」

This time it wasn't the woman who put down money, but the shorter woman who asked the bar owner. The clearly girl's voice was light and her way of speaking was graceful. The men whistled teasingly when they heard that, while the frown of the bar owner deepened even more.

「You guys, don't make a ruckus inside! ……Lasses, a bit of warning. If you two don't resist, then even this bunch ain't gonna go as far as taking your life. That's why……」

「That's the works. You too, don't run off your mouth okay? There ain't any guarantee that you'll keep your life the next time.」

「Kuh……」

The bar owner gritted his teeth when the man told him that. One of the men moved his hand toward the cloak of the shorter woman, then──.

Gagonn!

「──aga?」

The other cloaked woman slammed her palm on the man's jaw from the side. The man's head twisted to the side until even his own neck broke. Just how much strength was needed to cause something like that? The man didn't even realize that his neck broke as his eyes rolled back and he collapsed.

「──Wha-!?」

「You, what……」

The men didn't understand what just happened. They only understood that they got "attacked" and hurriedly move their attention to their waist to draw out their weapon. The moment their focus shifted, the woman's cloak fluttered and two white arms flashed out from there. They snapped the necks of two more men like dry twigs.

「W-what the helll!」

The last man drew out a curved sword and swung it down with a bewildered face. But a glove wearing hand softly traced the side of the blade to divert it away. The man lost his balance and stumbled forward where the woman's palm smashed his jaw so hard from below that his head snapped backward.

The collapsing man's hand grabbed the woman's cloak and exposed the face of the girl who slaughtered everyone in the blink of eye without drawing any blood.

Glossy and tight white skin along with pink blond hair. The bar owner unconsciously gulped seeing the girl's gruesome beauty and the difference in "status" that was displayed just now. The shorter woman slightly lifted up her hood and stared appraisingly at him with blue eyes that were surrounded by white skin.

「For the time being, can you please provide us with meals……and tell us more about this town?」

The Two's Bond

Going back slightly in time──.

.

Elena and I got dragged into Teleport sorcery and sent to an unknown land.

Dry wind. Small grain of sand that clung on the skin. Bright morning sunlight without even any cloud to block it, illuminating the vast ruins city that looked hazy due to the dust cloud. Elena muttered that ruins' name when she saw that.

「……Resvel?」

「Y-yes……I too had only read it in book and never actually saw it myself before this, but if we're still in Thurs Continent, then I don't know any other city ruins located in a desert other than that.」

The ancient ruins enveloped by sands like a bride's veil…….

Elena told me about the ancient ruins that she knew from book. It was unknown how old the ruins was. At the very least it was something that had existed before this continent's indigenous people, Cruz people formed a nation. It was uncertain what kind of race was living in this continent before that.

This city had different architectural style than the Cruz people who lived in the west region of the continent and the long lived forest elf. Even though it was completely built using sandstone, other than the outer coating it still hadn't gotten eroded by weather until now and left behind complicated structures that told us how it must have looked at the ancient time.

The greatest trait of this city ruins was its immense size. Its vastness even rivaled a small country. It would take a month just to cross it. Not a single person knew the city on the whole. It was even said that there was dragon living in its depth.

「There's no human?」

「Perhaps……at the ruins.」

Elena's face looked pale under the morning sunlight. It mustn't be just because of the fatigue from getting attacked.

If this place was that Resvel, we would have to travel a distance that was equal to crossing more than four foreign countries at least in order to get back to Claydale that was located at the southeast region of the continent. Elena was maintaining the balance of the kingdom's internal affair. If her wellbeing continued to be unclear for a long time, it was possible that it would result not that differently than if the evil race successfully kidnapped her alive.

Elena was feeling frustrated, because she couldn't die in the way that left no doubt to everyone.

At that time, if I followed Elena's will and killed her with my own hand rather than Gostoura, at the very least the neutrally leaning nobles would support the crown prince. It wouldn't be the best result, but it might be able to maintain the status quo.

But, I wanted Elena to keep struggling to live until the very end.

「Let's go home, Elena. If it's just death then you can do that anytime. Claydale Kingdom too isn't a weak country that'll be ruined in just several months.」

「Aria……」

Elena lifted up her head when she heard my words. My face was reflected in those blue eyes.

I wanted her to stay alive. That was my selfishness. But I wouldn't give up. I would bring Elena back before the country fell into chaos no matter what.

Perhaps my determination was conveyed to her. Her usual strength returned into her eyes.

「We did……promise. To not give up.」

Elena smiled just a little.

「I understand, Aria. But, just promise me one thing……. If I get into a situation where I won't be able to return back no matter what……kill me, and return back even if only by yourself. Tell everyone of my death.」

「Elena……」

She was strong. There was the radiance of strength hidden inside her frail figure. When my hand reached out toward that, Elena wrapped both her hands over mine as though she was praying.

「Please……」

「……Got it.」

We both leaned on each other. Then after a while we slowly parted and stared at each other while turning forward. Then we nodded together.

「Let's decide our plan.」

First was to reach a place where people lived. It would be great if that place had magic tool to contact faraway place, but the possibility of that was exceedingly small. In the first place such magic tool was very rare. Elena estimated that we wouldn't be able to find a communication magic tool that could communicate through long distance between countries unless we went until Carlfan Empire.

「This is just guesswork but, with the ruins here, it's possible that there are also adventurers combing through it.」

Most likely they would also have a base near the ruins. Elena said that there was a high chance that there would be a settlement south of the ruins, the direction where Carlfan Empire was at.

「Roger. First thing is to find a settlement. After that is finding a way to go to Carlfan Empire. We'll think more after finding a settlement.」

「I don't mind. Also we're going to work together from here on, so can you please treat me as a comrade?」

The two of us would return. Elena became forward looking with that objective and her expression looked somewhat delighted. The situation was like this, but that was exactly why her original brightness came out seeing that she was a strong girl.

「Roger. Then……sleep Elena.」

「……Eh?」

Elena made a puzzled face because she thought that she would assigned a task to do. But, this too was an important work of "adventurer".

「Elena hasn't slept right? Besides the temperature is low right now, but it will become high quickly when the sun climb up. We'll move at evening.」

According to that woman's "knowledge", the temperature difference during night and noon at desert was extreme. I didn't know whether that knowledge could also be applied in this world, but at the very least I was feeling with my skin that the temperature was increasing slowly right now.

「We'll get back a little and find a place to rest. Sip water frequently in small amount.」

「Y-yes.」

I returned to the rocky mountain's forest with Elena hurriedly following behind. I also took some roasted nuts from my [Storage] and handed it to her.

「……[Water]……」

Perhaps because the air was dry, I couldn't see much water magic particle with my eyes. The amount of water I could get with livelihood magic wasn't much. But seeing that, Elena who had water attribute produced water for my portion too.

Although I called it forest, it was near the desert so it was more like a thicket with only rocky place around. The trees were straight and thin with only few leaves, so when I found a spot that seemed passable as cover, I took out my cloak from [Storage] and handed it to Elena.

「We'll nap in turn. I'll wake you after two hours so until then……」

「Go sleep first, Aria.」

Elena interrupted my words and pushed back the cloak I held out to her. Her face looked a bit angry.

「There are some dark circles around your eyes. Perhaps you haven't slept for several days correct? I'm still alright so you go sleep first.」

「……Roger.」

I was still fine if it was just for staying awake but, it was true that my stamina had been decreasing considerably. Besides Elena had the personality of someone who wouldn't change her mind, so I rethought it and accepted her offer.

「Then take this. Sorry that it's my second hand but, it should be better than that thin thing.」

Right now Elena was only wearing thin sleepwear with my spare cloak on top of it, along with the loafers that I used at the academy. It would be problematic if she kept dressing up like that from here on.

I took out my academy uniform from the Storage and handed it to her.

It wasn't the third type uniform for noble's servant, but the first type uniform that I rarely wore.

The academy's uniform was different from the dress that noble wore. It was made to last long. That was in consideration that the students were wearing the uniform everyday for a long time. But not only that, apparently it also had the function to balance the wearer's temperature although it was slight.

Different from dress and uniform for servant, the skirt's length reached until the calf, but long skirt would only be in the way for walking through desert.

Elena accepted my uniform while acting a bit strangely, then she suddenly looked puzzled.

「Your Storage……was it? It has clothes and even food in it. Its capacity is really big isn't it?」

「That so?」

When I first activated Storage, it only had the capacity of a single bag. But, the level of my magic power control went up and my dark magic also reached level 4. It was a level where it became possible to create a spatially expanded bag. By using it over and over and getting used to it, the capacity grew until it was as large as a somewhat big dress cabinet now.

Bacteria couldn't live inside [Storage] so even food was like it was in a canned state inside there. Clothes also wouldn't smell and hard to become damaged in there, so I put in almost everything that I often used into there.

My magic power control had also become level 5, so if it was now then perhaps I could put in a bit more.

「Then, I'll rest first. Wake me up right away if something happen.」

I leaned on a rock and curled into myself by hugging my knees. Then my consciousness quietly sunk into darkness while listening to Elena's voice.

「Sleep well……Aria」

***

Elena's lips smiled slightly seeing Aria falling asleep immediately.

She was strong and beautiful. Anyone who looked at her figure would let out a sigh. But now that she was asleep, her sleeping face looked childish which was unimaginable from how she usually acted.

Looking carefully, not only Aria hadn't slept for several days, there were also wounds that hadn't fully healed on her arms and cheek. Her glossy hair and skin were also dirty with blood and mud.

「……[Clean]……」

Elena whispered the chanting of sorcery to purify the filth on Aira. But by doing that, it made her realized once more that Aria was more skilled in using Clean.

It was thought that sickness was caused by the filth in the air and the mischief of spirits. But Aria said the true identity of filth was living thing so small that the eyes couldn't see them. Apparently it was possible to stay healthy by moderately purifying them.

「What a mysterious child……」

Elena caressed the cleaned up pink hair of Aria who possessed such strange knowledge. She also erased the remaining wounds on Aria using [Cure].

Just how fierce the fight that she had gone through……. Aria fought Grave who was said as the strongest in the black ops, and then she immediately came running to save her. Elena was healing the wounds remaining on her body while feeling like tears would escape her eyes.

From here on the two of them would have to work together. But, her Clean and Cure were below Aria who was more knowledgeable about human body. And that difference was even bigger when it came to battle.

(……I want to get stronger.)

Elena earnestly wished that. At the very least she wanted to be able to protect herself. So that Aria wouldn't need to become even more injured than this…….

.

After Aria's wounds were healed, the sunlight got stronger just like she said.

Elena quietly stood up. She was thinking to finish changing her clothes while the shadow was still long.

Among the daughters of high ranked nobles, there were also those who left changing clothes completely to their maid from start to finish. As a royalty Elena too was living like that until she was four years old, but she changed her way of thinking after her mother cut her off, and due to meeting Aria when she was seven years old, she was practicing so that she could do the bare minimum by herself.

She took off her thin sleepwear. Then when she picked up the uniform that Aria lent to her, she recalled that it was something that Aria had worn and a bit of embarrassment reared its head inside her.

A princess like Elena had never shared anything with other person. Her clothing, her chair, and even the cup she used to drink tea, everything were treated as exclusively hers.

Even when she was eating outside the palace, Elena's maids would bring her own cutlery and tableware for her use. But, from here on she would have to eat even food that wasn't hygienic, but the current Elena wasn't feeling that disgusted by such prospect.

When Elena enrolled into the academy, she was surprised seeing the girls from middle ranked noble houses sharing things with their friends like it was only natural. She even felt jealous with that.

Elena had no friend. There were noble daughters who she regularly talked with, but their relationship was nothing more than a princess and her

subject. Her cousin Clara was her friend who was like her real sister before, but now there was crack so big between them that it would be difficult to restore that relationship.

Aria was the only one who was in a nearly equal relationship with her, but she was her like-minded comrade. There was a line separating the two of them as a princess and a bodyguard.

But……now that she was borrowing her private object, it was as though…….

(……Like we're……"friend")

That thought sent a ripple into Elena's heart.

She was always watching Aria so she understood how to wear the uniform. Her heart was drumming loudly when she put her arm into the sleeve for the first time. Even so when she finished wearing it, she found that the sleeves and skirt were too long for her because of the difference in their height.

She was unable to wear it neatly like Aria, which made her felt somewhat down. Even so a smile formed on Elena's lips because this was her first experience sharing something with Aria.

「……」

The truth was she was scared. Although she had the resolve to die, she never thought of wanting to die. The heavy pressure of being a princess, the resolve of shouldering the country, she was able to endure them because she had seen the way Aria struggled and she wanted to stay at her side for her.

She wanted to go home together with Aria. For that she wished to become strong while quietly sitting down beside the sleeping Aria. Then she leaned her head on the girl's shoulder just for a little bit.

Journey

Thurs Continent also had four seasons. Even when spring ended and summer approached, at Melun Confederation at the north the short spring would have only just arrived. But at Claydale Kingdom that was located at the south, the weather would be sunny even at the territory of Baron Seylace at the north that people would get sweaty.

Deep inside a forest in such region, a single woman wearing a well-worn simple robe was plucking vegetables and herbs that were planted in the garden and put them into her basket. Then she stood up and lifted up both her arms to stretch her body that was stiff from crouching for a long time.

「Nn~~……」

Her flowing silver hair twinkled from the sunlight when she stretched up her body like that. That woman who looked like she was still in her late thirty had skin that was glossy black like obsidian.

.

Dark elf. A race that lived at the far west of this Thurs continent. They had long lifespan like forest elf. A beautiful demihuman race that could even be called fairy.

They were few in number, but it was said that they had existed in this continent before even Crus people who were the indigenous people of human race. They had some interaction with Cruz people and other races. But……the “holy church” of Melsenia people that migrated to this continent a thousand years ago debased the dark elves as messenger of the evil god to make a common enemy in order to avoid a conflict with Cruz

people. All the races ended up persecuting them and from that grudge, they ended up calling themselves as [Evil Race], the enemy of mankind.

But, even the reason to fight would change after a thousand years passed. At the beginning they fought in order to clear up their grudge against all the races that were their enemy, but now their hostility was directed more toward the holy church rather than mankind on the whole. In order to whittle down the holy church's power, the evil race sometimes went into war with human nations in their attempt to collapse the framework called nation.

Serjura became feared and called [War Demon] in such war not only by human but also by evil race. She became fed up by her life, and more than that she didn't want her young little sister to end up like her, so she faked her death, left the evil race army, and hid herself in this land.

Serjura returned from her garden and added the leaf vegetable she had just harvested into the stew that she had prepared. She took her meal and then she created potion in order to sell to a peddler who was one of her few acquaintances.

In the middle of such routine that was the same everyday, recently there were more things that she had to do. When night came and she judged that she wouldn't need to use a lot of mana anymore for the rest of the day, Serjura performed the "experiment" that had become her new daily routine.

「──Iron Rose──」

Along with that "activation word", Serjura's silver hair fluttered up as though there was wind blowing.

.

▼Serjura　Race：Dark Elf♀・Rank 5

【Magic Power：387／425】【Stamina：215／250】

【Overall Combat Strength：2006（With special body strengthening:3786）】

【Battle Skill：Iron Rose/ Limit 38 Second】

.

「……kuh」

Her magic power was decreasing rapidly. Serjura deactivated Iron Rose and let out a tired sigh. Then she unconsciously grumbled.

「I can't believe that surly disciple can use something like this properly……」

Her beloved disciple Aria once returned here one year ago. She heard from her the fundamental of [Iron Rose], the Battle Skill that got its name from a dungeon spirit.

It was a Battle Skill so anyone could use it as long as they fulfilled the condition. In fact Serjura too could activate it though it took her time.

But, the condition was to convert the magic particle inside one's body into pure mana without any element in it. It was a troublesome condition. Even Serjura only became able to purify the mana to a certain degree using her level 5 magic power control, and she was still forced to consume more than ten times of mana than Aria when using the skill.

She couldn't use it properly like that. She hypothesized that the cause was the mana's purity, but most likely that wasn't all. She considered that her hair color not changing like with Aria was also one of the factors, so Serjura wrote the experiment result on a paper for the sake of her disciple who was always reckless all the time.

Just like how Serjura passed down the magic that she composed to her surly disciple, Aria also taught the magic that she created to her master.

There was no danger when using the dark magic [Feel] and [Pain], but magic that used the shadow inside the body like [Storage] didn't exist

before this, so the difficulty of learning it was high and it was unknown what kind of effect it would have to human body. So Serjura also used Storage with her own body to research it.

It was then──

「……Someone's here.」

Serjura who was doing sorcery research on the living room's table suddenly lifted up her face.

She erased the [Light] inside the room with [Dark] and took out a hatchet from her own Storage while standing up.

There was someone outside. But, it wasn't a human's presence. Serjura realized that she couldn't feel any hostility from that presence and rested her hatchet on her shoulder while heading to the entrance. There she whipped open the door.

「As expected from a mythical beast, so courteous. ……Are you alone?」

.

<──Right──>

.

The feeler shaped whiskers growing from the ears sparked. It made the owner's silhouette that was lurking in the darkness flashed for an instant.

There a huge mythical beast Coeurl was standing quietly. It had jet black fur that was blending with the forest's darkness and a figure that looked like a black panther.

The mythical beast Coeurl──Nero who was accompanying Aria everywhere. It had come to this place just once together with Aria, but at that time Serjura was wary toward the mythical beast, while Nero too wouldn't approach near her.

The mythical beast Coeurl was an existence that was superior to human and wouldn't open its heart to one. Why was it here? This Coeurl opened its heart to only one person, Aria who gave it the name Nero. Serjura thought it strange that she didn't see Aria together with it, even so she got a bad premonition and attempted to open communication with Nero while keeping some distance open between them.

「And? What's your business here? What happened with my surly disciple?」

Sparks lit up in the darkness as though to answer Serjura's questioning words.

<──Moon──>

<──Dark──>

<──Fight──>

<──Magic──>

<──Move──>

「W-wait a second.」

Serjura stopped Nero who was barraging her with thoughts that tried to convey something to her. She pressed her fingers on her forehead to endure the pain.

Coeurl could generate weak electricity from its feelers to disturb sorcery or conveyed its thought. But, it was said that Coeurl came from another world. Its language system was too different that Serjura couldn't understand its meaning when it conveyed too much all at once. She also felt headache because of the electric signal.

(That surly disciple, I can't believe she can have "conversation" with this……)

The last time they came, it was also Aria who translated everything that Nero thought. Serjura felt that it would be difficult to interact with Nero without that Aria mediating between them, but she felt something like “anxiety” from Nero. She sighed and glared at the huge beast before her.

「……Tell me from the start.」

After that she listened to Nero’s hard to understand explanation before she finally managed to understand what it wanted to say when the morning sun was about to rise.

「……That surly disciple, fought evil race vampires, and got teleported with sorcery together with the princess?」

<──Right──>

When the situation was summarized shortly, that was all that she got. Partly it was also because Nero wasn’t actually witnessing the scene in person, but the mythical beast Nero explained the flow of mana that it detected in that fight to Serjura, and she finally grasped the situation after spending a tremendous effort.

「That surly disciple got caught in teleportation. But, your senses felt something not right with the Teleport……. Most likely they slightly shifted away from the evil race country. That girl too is a practitioner who can use space type magic, so it’s likely that she resisted the teleportation but…… from the past incidents, the chance is high that their teleport destination went off course.」

Serjura hypothesized the evil race’s action as a former evil race soldier herself.

She remembered that the treasure warehouse of evil race country definitely had magic tool that could use Teleport. There was no rank 6 dark sorcerer even in Serjura’s memory, so most likely they used that item.

It would be a different story if it was someone who excelled in space sorcery, but anyone else would likely cause problem with the teleportation

if they couldn’t clearly imagine the destination even if they used magic tool to invoke the sorcery.

「……They would either fall at the desert, or Carlfan Empire. And? What do you want by telling me this?」

<—On—>

「……」

Nero showed its back to her and lowered its stance. Serjura turned speechless seeing that.

A mythical beast would never allow human to ride their back. Nero accepted Aria alone as its comrade and allowed her to get on its back, but even that should be something impossible usually. Subduing mythical beast into submission was impossible.

Furthermore Nero was saying that in order to go save Aria……in order to increase the chance to find Aria, it would allow even Serjura to get on its back.

「……」

『……』

The two glared at each other silently. Why was Nero going this far for Aria? But, Serjura noticed that she herself wouldn’t be able to explain it with word if she applied that question to herself. Her expression loosened into a self-depreciating smile.

Serjura was also concerned with Aria like Nero. She believed that if it was Aria then she would return back safely while protecting the princess, but at the same time she realized that a part of herself was worrying for Aria like she was her daughter.

In that moment, it felt like there was something connecting together between Serjura and Nern.

Their reason differed. But their objective was the same.

「I get it. Let's go.」

.

Like that the dark elf and the mythical beast Coeurl departed to the west region.

They followed their heart.

***

「Elena, can you still go on?」

「……Yes, I'm still alright, Aria.」

Elena and I rested until evening. Then we began moving when the temperature had lowered down enough.

The magic stone in Elena's heart had became smaller and her body became robust, even so her stamina was still below an ordinarily healthy person. Right now rather than spending the time to make preparation here for crossing the desert, we thought that we should head toward the settlement while avoiding the ruins while we still had food and stamina in reserve.

First we were heading toward the settlement that we predicted was located at the south of Resvel. There was a good chance that there were adventurers aiming to gather material and treasure in the ruins. This was a gamble that we couldn't avoid, but it would be better than running around blindly.

In the geographical information that Elena remembered, there was Carlfan Empire south of Resvel, but it should take a month to walk to there, so we could only think that travelling directly there would be reckless.

.

『GIIII!!』

A beetle monster that was one meter long suddenly appeared. Elena stopped its movement with water magic, while I rushed and thrusted my knife into the gap of its carapace, cutting off its head.

It was a rank 2 monster but we couldn't let our guard down against an enemy that we faced for the first time. Insect monster would still be alive for a while even after its head was cut off, but the threat should be gone for now with this.

Originally we should dismantle the body now to obtain material and magic stone, but right now we were prioritizing to keep moving. We were focusing only on going forward.

Elena had become optimistic after deciding our destination. She also looked at me for direction when fighting, not simply standing around as target to be protected. Even if this was just her acting tough…….

If I was alone I could survive even if I had to eat monster's corpse. But that wasn't the case for Elena. Because she herself also understood that she was starting to struggle desperately in order to survive.

「Let's go.」

「Yes.」

I could see a bit of exhaustion in Elena's face.

Elena was strong……but frail.

She must hated being weak and a burden who needed someone else to offer their hand to her. I understood that even while I offered my hand to her who was walking behind me. Elena too smiled slightly while lifting her hand toward me. Then we started walking while holding hand through the desert under the starry sky that didn't have a single cloud everywhere.

We moved throughout the night and rested in a rock's shadow during the day. Sometimes we hunted monster and ate their meat. We kept travelling

like that and four days after we started, we finally discovered a small town from above a rocky place.

The Two Boys

The desert town, Cutlass.

The ancient city ruins Resvel was bordered with the desert of death and Rost Mountain Range. This town was located half a day of travel from there. It was said that its name originated from the curved sword that the people of the desert preferred.

That town that was some distance away from the ancient ruins was a settlement that was built by people mired in greed.

Carlfan Empire was located around one month of one-way travel from there, but this town didn't belong to the empire.

That was why every kind of race and people was living in coexistence there.

Adventurer, grave robber, criminal, exile. The majority of them were Cruz people, but there were also dog and cat beastman and dwarf. Not only them, dark elf that was called evil race could even be seen there although they were few in number.

Just as could be understood from how the town was named after a weapon, this town that was formed by the gathering of adventurers and thugs didn't even have a feudal lord governing it, or soldiers to protect the public order. It was each person's own responsibility whether they stayed alive or dead.

The only way to protect oneself was to join one of the powerful organizations. This town was known as a lawless area where only people with strength could survive.

.

「This town is that kinda shitty place without any order, but there's still the minimum rule. Cruz people's Kirly Company that is selling food, the dwarf's Hogros Company that sell weapon and manage the adventurers……those two called themselves company, but both of them ain't any proper merchant. And then there's the Munza Gang that is formed by the beastman thugs, and Riezan Family that controlled all the gambling and red district regardless of race. Don't go against these four organizations in this town.」

The owner of the bar that we visited right after entering this Cutlass town said that without any amusement while bringing food to the counter where we were sitting.

He was a resident of this town so we couldn't trust everything he said but he also wasn't a malicious person. At the very least he had the conscience to tell us to leave this town when he realized that we were Melsenian woman.

The food he served was made from sorghum flour that was kneaded and baked. It was a type of bread like nan in that woman's knowledge. He also gave us fruit water with light green color.

I called it fruit water but, it was just something made from peeling the leaf of a thick thorny plant that could grow in the desert and squeezing them. It only had a light bitterness and slight sweetness to it, but apparently it was nutritious.

I took sip of that grassy-smelling liquid and not pm the bread too to check that there was no poison, then I nodded at Elena who was sitting beside me that it was alright. She took a sip of the fruit water before talking to the bar owner.

「Which organization do you belong to?」

「None of them. One place to drink will be gone if this place is destroyed……I'm just barely left alone because of that kinda stupid reason. ……How's it? The meal here is bad right?」

The bar owner asked Elena who had just tore a piece of the bread and ate it. Elena smiled vaguely with only her lips.

「You can get proper food if you join Kirly Company, but the price is stupidly high, and they'll also demand tax if you open a restaurant. If your payment's late, everything you got will get stripped off before you can even blink. You'll be just their slave. The dwarves're relatively better but, those guys will go crush any strong fellow who ain'tdwarf.」

The bar owner was fearful at the beginning after I killed the customers that picked a quarrel with us, but it seemed that he had calmed down or perhaps resigned himself. He taught us some things about this town.

When I asked it seemed that he was a former adventurer, but apparently he caught the eye of Hogros Company that took over the role of adventurer guild in managing the adventurers and got one of his legs crushed. It seemed his fellow adventurer at that time used Cure, but it couldn't completely heal his leg and his path as adventurer ended there.

The customers who I eliminated were underlings of Riezan Family that was in charge of the red district, but they were just the bottom of the barrel so the bar owner said that there wouldn't be any revenge coming for us. Apparently low ranked human adventurer would clean up their corpse. But Hogros Company would send a bill to this restaurant as the cleaning fee so the bar owner was at his wits' end. Because of that I put down several more silver coins as information fee.

It seemed that improved his mood. Or perhaps because there was no other customer than us or he had free time, the bar owner warned us when we were about to leave.

「You lass……. I know that you're quite strong but, don't stand out too much. Fight between underlings is normal here but, if you do something to an organization's top brass, they'll come to crush you to maintain their face even if you're just a kid or a woman.」

.

We left the bar and headed toward the town's entrance that the bar owner told us the location. I called out to Elena who was showing a slightly pondering look.

「……What do you think?」

「Let's see……. At the very least I didn't feel that he was lying. Though I also can't say that he told us everything.」

Elena was in charge of negotiating. It was because she was more knowledgeable than me about foreign country, and there was also how my way of speaking had slight Claydale accent, so it would be better if I left this kind of thing to her who had experience in interacting with people from Carlfan Empire.

「He didn't lie but, he was reluctant to give us information about the organizations……I guess that there are things that he can't say to keep himself safe. Either way, it'll be dangerous to make decision based on information just from a single person, so let's gather more information after this.」

「Roger.」

There were quite a lot of people even outside the fence that was surrounding the town. A lot of people turned their gaze at us who were hiding our face with hooded cloak, but nobody tried to make trouble with us.

It was this kind of city so there were many suspicious people everywhere. No matter whether they were adventurer or drifter, no decent person would come to this kind of place. Only criminal who was chased by their country or someone with shady past would come here.

With hooded cloak covering our whole body, it would be impossible to [Appraise] us accurately even if someone caught a glimpse of us. Perhaps that was why I caught sight of some other people dressed the same like us.

.

We walked for several hours along the outer wall surrounding the town before we found one of the gates to enter the town.

Rock dwarves wearing armor with strange luster were protecting the gate. ……They weren't merely guards. They weren't guards like in Claydale Kingdom who were approachable by traveler, but rank 2 warriors who were on guard against monster attack.

Them being dwarf might meant that they were member of Hogros Company that was managing the adventurer guild of this area.

If I was alone I could climb over the wall and hid myself inside but…….

「Aria, let's go from the front. It's not a good move to cause trouble without even knowing about the state of affairs completely.」

「Roger.」

I followed Elena's opinion and stepped forward. Negotiation was Elena's field but I judged that if the other party was adventurer then it would be better if I stepped up.

「Stop! Who are you guys, outsider!?」

The rock dwarf guard raised his voice with a tone that sounded angry toward us who were approaching them.

Outside or inside huh? In other words, he was asking whether we were townspeople or not. Normal resident should cower if they got questioned with voice that loud, but I knew that this was *normal* for rock dwarf.

「We're with merchant caravan. We went outside for some business.」

「You two……with just women?」

The guard made a suspecting look for an instant. I intentionally spoke gently and slowly held out my right hand toward him.

「I'm bodyguard. Sorry to make problem for you. Sorry that I only have foreign money but go buy some drink with this.」

「……Oo, it's great if you know.」

The rock dwarf saw that it was silver coin that I gave him and grinned. Then he told his friends to open the way.

It would become troublesome if the money I gave him was too much or too little. With our number and a rock dwarf as the other party then the cost of drink would be just right.

We entered the town and saw that it was completely different from Claydale Kingdom. The building was different. The people were different. There was no plant inside the town. The buildings were built with only stone. Cloth that was weaved from plant was hanged up toward the street to block the sunlight. It formed a townscape that was completely different than the kingdom.

And most of all……the eyes of the people inside the town were sharp as though they were hungering for something.

「Stay close.」

「……Yes.」

We were searching for a relatively safe lodging in this town.

According to that bar owner, as expected using an organization's inn would be the best to buy safety in this town. And as long as we had money, then Kirly Company that was mainly handling food and daily life product wouldn't be hostile toward us. They also had several inns that were used by merchant from Carlfan Empire who visited this town.

When we entered one of such inn, there was a middle aged woman working as the receptionist. She was looking at us with suspicion but, she instantly became all smiles when we handed a small gold coin and treated us like VIP.

The cost of staying for a night without meal was two silver coins per person. It was a price that was close to a high class inn at the kingdom, but the room that we were given was at the same level of a countryside inn that would cost five small silver coins.

For now we would stay for two days with one small gold coin. I handed the rest of our money to the receptionist for two days worth of food, hush money, and tip. It was a lot of money but, a safe place to sleep was necessary so Elena's stamina could recover.

「……Aria. Can this become money?」

We entered our room and could finally relax after confirming the safety of the place. Then Elena said that and handed a knife to me.

That was the knife that Elena had with her for killing herself. It was something that noble daughter carried around with them. The knife that belonged to a princess like Elena had jewels embedded in it so they could be exchanged for money when pushes came to shove. From what I heard before, they could be sold for five big gold coins in a proper shop, but I quietly pushed back that knife to Elena.

「We're not that troubled for money yet. Carry it with you until it's really necessary.」

「……Understood.」

Elena seemed to realize the meaning of my vague words. If two woman drifters exchanged such pricy thing for money, there was a risk that we would catch someone's eyes. If we were going to use it, we would need someone and a situation where it was possible to disclose Elena's identity to some degree.

I could give out my name that was a fake name from the start, but Elena's name still had to be kept secret.

Elena understood that and tightly held the knife on her chest. She quietly nodded.

「Let's confirm our plan.」

The final objective was Elena's return but, first we had to send the news of Elena's survival to Claydale Kingdom.

It had to be done within three months at the very least. We had been discussing our plan to some degree on our way to this town but, the method of borrowing communication magic tool from adventurer guild seemed impossible based on this town's situation. In the first place no matter the country, the communication magic tool would be under the control of the country. It was possible for guild or high ranked noble to have one, but the possibility of merchant having it was exceedingly low. Even if they had it, if they found out Elena's identity it was possible that they would kidnap her to be used for political bargaining.

We had also considered asking a merchant who came to this town to allow us to go back with them until Carlfan Empire, but there was a distant of one month from the empire until her. Any merchant who came to this kind of place would definitely be connected to Kirly Company or Hogros Company, so we would require serious connections if we wanted to go that route.

If possible Elena's identity should be kept secret until we reached Carlfan Empire. Elena and I agreed on htat. If we wanted to head to Carlfan Empire while keeping Elena's identity a secret, I also considered the method of working as adventurer doing bodyguard request, but most likely the merchants here already had their own personal bodyguards seeing how far the distance they had to travel.

That one month distance was also problematic if we wanted to travel by ourselves. There wasn't any inn town midway. Elena's stamina wouldn't last if we had to cross the rocky areas and desert by walking alone.

Elena's stamina had decreased greatly even just from these several days of walking. She was acting to be fine in front of me, but even the amount of food she was eating was decreasing. I couldn't force her anymore than this.

「It’ll be better to rest already for the rest of the day. You haven’t slept much right? Let’s think again tomorrow.」

「Yes……」

Elena too seemed to have felt the limit of her stamina. I applied Clean on her and the bed, then she obediently sat on it. I had also worked as maid after a fashion, so I moved to help her changing her clothes, but she refused saying that she wanted to do it herself.

「Also, use this. Sorry that it’s my secondhand but it has defensive capability.」

「T-this is your thing!?」

What I handed her was underwear. They were created by Gelf. There were thin tights and garter belt made from mythril fiber, then bustier also made from mythril fiber. They had white or black color with five sets of each. I handed the white sets to Elena because of my impression that it would suit her more. But those weren’t all, Elena spread open the small silk panty that had to be tied at the sides using string to wear, which was something that I got from Gelf too. She turned bright red and froze.

「What’s wrong……?」

「No, umm……」

Come to think of it, this type of underwear came from Dandall, so it had only been accepted by female adventurers and some noble ladies. If I remembered correctly, Elena was usually wearing short drawers, so perhaps she had reluctance to wear a new type of underwear.

When I looked at her while wondering what to do, Elena’s stare went back and forth between me and the underwear several times. She turned bright red until her ears, then she looked down and murmured with a small voice.

「……P-please help me wear them.」

「Roger.」

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The next morning we had breakfast with a stew of potato and bean that the innkeeper brought us. Then we headed toward Hogros Company where adventurers gathered.

The bar owner said that it was “relatively better”, but we couldn’t let our guard down. Even then we were heading there not only to earn money, but also to raise our reputation as adventurer, which was our main reason.

Money and strength were needed to buy safety here. But, Hogros Company would crush anyone not dwarf who showed their strength. Even so connection with Kirly Company would be needed if we were going to show our strength.

If we showed our strength as adventurer and formed connection with Kirly Company, the possibility of being able to accompany a caravan to Carlfan Empire would be born.

There we were thinking to sell medicine in order to obtain that. According to the innkeeper who we tipped, the life necessities in this town were really expensive. It was difficult to gather ingredients in desert, while Kirly Company was importing necessary potion from Carlfan Empire, so the ordinary people couldn’t even use them often.

But, in the handwritten book that was entrusted to me by master, a dark elf who lived in this region, there was writing about the ingredients and the method to create potion that wasn’t common in this region. I too had learned it.

There was also dark elf in this city, and it was possible that they too understood that method, but this method was using monster part as some of its ingredients, and it was unthinkable that a dark elf living in obscurity in this kind of town could be a better alchemist than master.

We would accept quest as adventurer that wouldn’t make us stood out, obtaining money and materials.

Then we would create high class potion using monster part, bring that to Kirly Company to make connection with them, and then the potion would flow toward the adventurers, putting us in a position where they couldn't touch us.

The problem was the two mafias but, we couldn't predict how they would move in the current situation. Just us being Melsenian young women would already make us stood out, so there was a risk that they would try something with us because of that.

In the worst case they would harm Elena……I would crush them if that happened.

.

「But Aria……this isn't the adventurer's gathering place isn't it?」

「Yes. First we need to buy equipments for you Elena.」

Hogros Company was replacing adventurer guild but, they were fundamentally merchant. The adventurer guild was right next door to Hogros Company.

Weapon, armor, and other metal items, all of them were being handled by Hogros Company, so naturally the company's building was selling weapon and armor.

The dwarves of Hogros Company didn't tolerate high ranked adventurer of other race because they would make it difficult for them to monopolize the materials. But perhaps even the exclusionary dwarves of this place wouldn't refuse business. The shop also had quite a collection of armor for human.

Armors and weapons were lined up in a space that was as big as a dance hall, but just from a brief look there was no armor or weapon that was as good as Galbas or Gelf's creation.

The stubborn rock dwarves were working as gate guard but, it was mostly mountain dwarves like Dalton who were good with carving who had

appearance like adventurer.

The weather must also be playing a factor. Heavy armor wasn't preferred in desert. What the shop had was mainly hard leather armor using what seemed to be lizard hide or armor with strange luster like what the gate guards wore.

Most likely that was made from beetle's carapace. It seemed that in this area the insect monsters could grow bigger than dungeon monster. It was lighter than metal but heavy armor would be disadvantageous for Elena. I chose leather armor that mainly protected the vitals, gloves, and boots. I also found a smallish short sword and purchased them all with four small gold coins.

Elena was hesitant to use money in our current situation, but this was a necessary expense.

「Do they suit me……?」

Despite her reluctance, wearing "adventurer" equipment that she should have never the chance to put on because of her position as a princess made Elena smiled. She asked me that question while twirling in high spirits.

But, it was then──

「Eh? A Melsenian girl. That's unusual.」

We heard that voice and turned around. Standing there was a Cruz boy our age wearing a friendly smile and──

「……」

Behind him was a slender dark elf boy, staring at us with a sharp gaze.

「──tsu」

Elena hurriedly put on her hood and hid her exposed face.

We were careless. Standing there were a duo of a Cruzian and a dark elf. From appearance both of them looked our age, but there was no guarantee that their appearance and actual age matched just like us.

It was especially difficult to judge the age of the long lived elf race based on appearance. The sharp gaze from the dark elf made me stepped in front of Elena to hide her from their gaze. The Cruz boy noticed that and lightly tapped the dark elf's shoulder.

「Kamil, don't scare a girl like that.」

「……」

When the Cruz boy said that, the dark elf──Kamil turned around without even changing his expression. The boy who was left alone shrugged playfully before pointing to a direction, waved his hand at us, and chased after Kamil.

「……Aria.」

「It's alright.」

The duo was suspicious……or rather, mysterious. Both of them were still young, but I felt that they were quite strong. They were also covering their whole body with cloak, so I couldn't do accurate Appraisal at them, but I guessed that it was also to hide their true strength.

But from their attitude, it didn't seem like they were the type of people who would spread around the fact that we were Melsenian. Perhaps Elena had also sensed that. Her wariness wasn't toward them.

This selling place was in a blind spot from Hogros Company and adventurer guild beside it, but I had been feeling a presence that was observing us ever since we entered this building.

Most likely this presence was evaluating us. From their perspective we must also be quite a suspicious duo. I couldn't predict how they would act from there but, that boy hinted at us that there was a possibility of attack.

We had a need to make connection with one of the four organizations but, we weren't thinking of joining hand with the two mafias. Then, which was better between Hogros Company and Kirly Company?

We needed to decide how to get involved with Hogros Company depending on how they would treat newcomer.

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「Let's go.」

「Yes.」

The two of us also left the building. At the same time I sensed several people started moving to follow us even though we were still within the ground.

「Ou, you two women there, wait. Not even giving a greeting after coming this far, that's real cold don't cha think?」

It was three men who were calling out to us like that. Two Cruzian and one dark elf……the two boys just now were also like that. This land wasn't rejecting dark elf as "evil race".

They were wearing beetle light armor with a thin jacket over it to block the sunlight. I guessed that these men were around rank 3. Their combat strength was over 350 so they were powerful fighter above middle rank as adventurer.

「What do you want?」

「Your voice is young……. Not many people come to this town other than merchant, so information is quite easy to find. You two are the women who went wild in the bar right? You look quite strong but, newcomer shouldn't throw their weight around.」

The Cruz person at the middle who was holding a spear was putting the pressure on us.

The people I killed in the bar were grunts of Riezan Family that was in charge of other race's thugs and red district. In that case these guys were also member of Riezan Family?

「I heard that it's fine if you're strong here though?」

「Hah, exactly. If I've gotta say, the guy who act big when they aren't even strong is at fault. That's why here it's the organization's power──」

「Your business?」

When I interrupted the man's words, the dark elf at the right side bared his fang in irritation.

「Do you know what'll happen to a little girl who don't know when to shut up?」

The dark elf's hands reached toward the twin swords on his waist while approaching. His breath slightly smelled of alcohol. I ignored him and turned my gaze toward the first Cruz person. The man grinned and showed his white teeth.

「Join Riezan Family little girl. In this town, the dwarves manage the adventurers while Munza Gang is in charge of the beastmen. Everyone else won't be able to live as adventurer unless they join us y'know. Sides' you can also work in red district under us. I'm gonna give that missy over there personal training yeah?」

Elena held her breath when she heard the man's words. The other men laughed.

「……I see.」

The violence in this town was managed by the dwarf's adventurer guild and beastman's Munza Gang. Even so that didn't mean the other races would just stay quiet. Riezan Family gathered those other races to break that hold.

Their proposition was *valid* in a sense. It would be possible to live as adventurer under the umbrella of Riezan Family. And “woman” would also have other path to survive with them.

But, our answer had been decided from the start.

「We refuse.」

I instantly did body strengthening. My magic power control that reached level 5 purified my mana. My palm that had its muscle strengthened struck the dark elf’s jaw from below. Then I grabbed his head without allowing him to react and slammed him on the coarse stone floor.

It was this kind of town. Someone making a threat and reaching toward their weapon was definitely enemy.

Furthermore, they tried to lay their hand on Elena. There was no way I could let them go at that point.

Splat There was a sound like melon getting squashed. The man at the left side of the Cruz person was dumbfounded for a moment before he pulled out his scimitar……just an instant before that steel blade was pulled out from its sheath, I who had strengthened my agility pulled out and fired my crossbow from the Storage. It pierced the man’s brain from his left eye.

「……Wha-」

The first man groaned seeing his fierce and tough rank 3 comrade killed instantly.

「You bitch-, Riezan Family’ll──」

The moment those words left the man’s mouth──.

A voice that was as loud as a gong roared from behind the Cruz person who was readying his spear.

Zun, there was a sound like the sandy rock that formed the floor got crushed. Coming out from the building of Hogros Company was a one eyed

mountain dwarf with darkish skin and pure white beard that grew until his waist.

The old dwarf was most likely older than even Galbas. He was clad in chainmail that was made from magic steel, carrying a huge halberd made from magic copper leaning his shoulder, and walked with a gait that pressured his surrounding.

「Jilgan……」

The Cruz man who noticed him unconsciously took a step back while a mutter escaped his mouth.

Jilgan. So that was this dwarf's name.

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▼Jilgan　Race: Mountain Dwarf ♂ – Rank ?

【Magic Power：220／220】【Stamina：438／454】

【Overall Combat Strength：1413（With Body Strengthening：1707）】

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Strong……. I assumed that he was an upper rank 4 or a lower rank 5.

Jilgan's eyes lingered on the corpses on the ground and me. He lightly raised an eyebrow before his single eye glared piercingly at the Cruzian man.

「You're a grunt of Riezan Family huh. Open that ear of yours youngster. As long as you're an adventurer, it doesn't matter which organization you belong to. But……」

「W-wait a second!」

The man tried to step back further, but in that moment, the halberd that was lightly swung around like it was just a tree branch dug into the man's

stomach and blew only his upper body to the other side of the street.

「You think I'm going to overlook someone who try to do something to adventurer right in front of my eyes? Oi, clean up these corpses!」

Jilgan said that in front of the lower body that fell down on the ground. Young dwarves approached to clean up the corpses while some onlookers around us screamed. Then he slowly returned his gaze to me.

「「……」」

Jilgan and I glared at each other wordlessly. Even the voices of the surrounding died down from that tense air. The people cleaning up the corpses were holding their breath as though to make themselves unseen. Then Jilgan quietly spoke.

「You, what's your name?」

「Aria.」

I shortly answered him. The corner of Jilgan's lips slightly rose before he rested his magic copper halberd on his shoulder and turned around.

「Strong guys are welcomed here. But……」

Jilgan paused there before radiating a pressure that wasn't killing intent.

「……Don't misjudge okay?」

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Jilgan's words were a warning. But, I felt like I could see Hogros Company's policy from his action and word.

They didn't trust anyone not dwarf but, they wouldn't go out of their way to become enemy to those who understood that. Right now it was enough that I could learn that.

We walked away from Hogros Company and toured the town. We finished resupplying ourselves with food and equipment that were quite expensive before returning to our inn. The next morning, after I was convinced that Elena's stamina had recovered quite well, we left the town and headed toward the ruins.

The adventurer guild wouldn't be our ally but they also weren't our enemy, so the gate guard let us passed just by showing an adventurer guild's tag.

「Elena……you alright?」

「Yes, thank you Aria.」

Elena's complexion didn't look good. It wasn't just because of the desert's climate and her condition, but also because she had seen too much human's death and malice since coming here.

It was this kind of town. Death was lingering everywhere. I too were merciless against enemy. But, Elena's surrounding until now had a wall that separated herself from the outside. Even though death had also occurred around her before, it was something that happened outside her view.

That was the reason I was taking her out of the town but, Elena was staring at me who was acting like that and quietly shook her head.

「I'm really fine Aria. Everything is something that *I* myself decided.」

「……Yes.」

She was forcing herself. Even so I would respect it if that was what she herself decided.

Elena wasn't just a doll that needed to be protected from everything. She was a human who was standing by her own will.

We were heading toward the ruins that was half a day away while it was still dark. It wasn't just for defeating monster. Of course we would defeat monster and harvest their parts if we ran into one but, our main objective was to obtain precious material in this area.

There was a flower called Death Root in this area that was used in making high class recovery medicine. It was an alchemy material that sometimes could be seen in graveyard at desert. Because of that it was a precious material that was few in number, but master said it needed the dry climate that was characteristic of desert and “miasma”.

There were various theories about the true identity of miasma, but it was said that it was generated in place that had negative emotion and pollution of death, and it served as the source of strength for undead and devil and the like.

It was uncertain why Death Root bloomed at place with miasma, but if I wanted to search it in this area, I thought that Resvel Ruins where a lot of undeads were roaming would be a good place.

Of course it would be dangerous. We would have no problem with zombie or skeleton that could be damaged with physical attack, but against monster with no physical body like wraith, the ordinary adventurers would find it difficult to even escape from them.

But it was different for Elena and me. Weapon made from magic steel could affect wraith though not as effectively as mythril. Elemental sorcery also affected them but, light sorcery’s Clean was even more effective. It was able to erase the miasma that was the source of undead’s existence.

「Aria, is this flower usable?」

「Yes. Only the petal parts are used, so you can just take the flower part.」

「I understand.」

Elena was plucking the Death Root’s flower with a serious face. We left the town at early morning and arrived at evening, then we had a light meal and a nap until the temperature lowered and night came before we started searching the ruins.

The ancient ruins became more dangerous the deeper you went. The outer circumference wasn’t that dangerous. You wouldn’t be able to build a town

that was just half a day of travel from here if that wasn't the case. It would be easier to find the precious ingredient if we advanced deeper where the miasma was thicker, but just as I thought, when I used my eyes to find a place where dark magic particles pooled and searched at the shadowy spots, we were able to find it unexpectedly easily even in this nearby place.

This flower was also a poisonous object that was difficult to handle, so if possible I didn't want Elena to touch it but, I asked her to help with harvesting because of her strong desire to help.

Both of us weren't harvesting at the same time. Either one of us would stand guard against the surrounding in case a wraith appeared.

Even so perhaps because adventurers often explored this area, we still hadn't encountered any undead, even skeleton much less wraith. Perhaps the vitality that human possessed had the effect to drive away miasma.

We were able to collect quite the amount of Death Root's flower. Perhaps it wasn't solely thanks to my eyes, but also because there was nobody collecting them. I put our harvest into Storage.

「Elena?」

Elena who had finished picking Death Root's flower was turning her face toward a wall with a puzzled look.

「No, this has been on my mind since some time ago but, it feels like there's vibration from the other side of the wall……」

「Vibration?」

Elena said that with an expression that looked unsure about her own words. I also approached the wall and confirmed that my Search skill wasn't detecting anything before I carefully touched the wall with my finger.

Then I focused my attention to the other side of the wall and certainly I felt a weak vibration. Perhaps Elena noticed it because she was closer to the ground from crouching to pick up flower. I pressed my ear on the ground to

ascertain the source of that vibration. From there I sensed that there was a battle it seemed.

「Something is fighting. ……What now?」

Perhaps there was a dangerous monster. But perhaps there was somebody who got attacked.

If it was adventurer then they were on their own. My role was to protect Elena. But, if someone was really being attacked and Elena would feel guilty from abandoning them, it would be fine to at least go check the situation.

I asked her like that with my gaze. Elena weighed the safety of her and me……and the weight of her mission, then she looked back into my eyes.

「Let's at least check the situation. We won't be able to respond well if we don't know what is actually causing this vibration.」

「Roger.」

We left the building we were in and headed toward the path where we were feeling the vibration from. There was no sign of monster nearby, unnaturally so. The moon was visible at the sky, but Elena didn't have night vision and I paid attention to not get too far away from Elena while gradually approaching the vibration's source. There we found silhouettes of people being attacked by more than ten beetle and worm monsters.

Were they civilian or adventurer? I reinforced my "eyes" with body strengthening and confirmed. I caught sight of the faces of those people just for an instant. They were familiar faces.

「What's going on?」

「It's those two. The Cruzian and dark elf boys.」

I returned and reported the situation to Elena. Elena made a conflicted look.

Those two were most likely adventurer. They were surrounded by quite a lot of monsters but they should be prepared for the worst if they were adventurer. If this was in Claydal Kingdom then I would help if I saw adventurer getting attacked, but I had no duty to save them if it would expose Elena to danger.

Elena too, although those two had warned us that we were in danger, she didn't know how far we could trust residents of that town.

If she couldn't decide then I was going to abandon them by my own decision. It was then we caught sight of sand cloud approaching from the other side of the street.

「That's……」

「More monster?」

Coming from the other end of the street was several huge beetles. But that wasn't all. We could also see a beastman running in front of them. And then I caught a faint smell mixed in the wind and frowned slightly.

「It's the smell of bug lure.」

「……Eh?」

I too once used it to gather insects in dungeon for trap against the assassin guild branch of north frontier district.

Was that beastman setting up trap against those two? If these two sides were enemies then I had no reason to put a stop to this. But it would be a different story if this was just a criminal act based on resentment or greed, but we had no way to know the truth.

「Elena.」

There was no "law" in this land. Strength was the only law. Law was decided by organization's strength.

That was why we had to decide ourselves what was right.

But it would be pointless if we made decision randomly. It was Elena who decided our action policy. I asked her what was her decision as princess. Elena took a short while to sort the situation, her emotions, and everything in her mind before she turned her gaze to the approaching beetles and beastmen. Then she spoke quietly.

「Let's wait.」

Elena said that we would stand on the road and observe the beastman's reaction.

If he was a decent people, they would hesitate to involve other people, which should show in their reaction. It was fine even if they only had a sliver of conscience. We would stay uninvolved if they had anything like that.

But──

「Aria!」

The moment that cat beastman saw us, he threw the bag he was holding toward us without giving any warning. So it was a scented bag! The beastman threw the insect lure toward us and grinned while running past us and climbed up a dilapidated building.

I confirmed that he was definitely hostile and threw a scythe shaped pendulum at the bag in the air. The bag was caught by the blade and I rotated the pendulum to toss back the bag toward the beastman.

「What!?」

「──Pain──」

That beastman stiffened from the illusionary pain and slipped down from the building he was climbing. Most likely he prioritized getting rid of witnesses but, the swarm of beetles that were attracted by the insect lure's scented bag that fell nearby drowned the death throes amidst them.

「Let's help them, Aria.」

「Roger, Elena. *Can you use it*?」

「If it's just activating it……」

「Got it. I'm going ahead.」

I checked that there was no monster's presence near Elena and dashed away in order to reinforce the duo who we had decided to help.

Originally I shouldn't leave Elena's side as her bodyguard. But, I also knew that Elena had been putting in effort in order to escape this situation.

That Cruzian boy and dark elf were being attacked by ten odd insect monsters.

From what I saw they were barely holding there. The dark elf looked like he was strong enough to endure, but the Cruzian boy wasn't as strong as him. The dark elf was fighting to protect the wounded human boy, so he couldn't use big technique like Battle Skill that would create opening after use.

Insects that were lured by the scented bag wouldn't run away because of their excited state. That was prolonging the current deadlock but, I'd have them maintain that deadlock while I went to eliminate the "cause" that was creating this current situation.

I rushed through the battlefield while focusing my "eyes".

It was blending among the presences of the duo and the insects who were fighting but, I discovered it through the magic particle colors. I snagged my pendulum's string on a dilapidated building's wall and then ran up the wall. I leaped out in front of the two cat beastmen hiding there.

「「Wha-!?」」

The two beastmen tried to lift up their bow with a shocked expression, but in that moment the scythe shaped pendulum that I had pulled back and rotated tore the carotid artery of one of them deeply.

「T-this woman, do you know who we──」

「Don’t know.」

But I had a guess. From their action that immediately tried to eliminate witness like us, I assumed that they were from Munza Gang, the mafia that united the beastman thugs.

I didn’t know the relation between Munza Gang and those two. But, these guys casually tried to kill witnesses in order to trap those two.

But we were the same. Now that we had got on the way of Munza Gang, there was no meaning of letting these witnesses to go home alive.

「Little girl!」

The beastman drew a curved sword with single edge and slashed. I slipped through it and stepped into his bosom in a single step. I crushed the man’s throat with an elbow strike before snapping his neck by putting my arms around it.

There was a reason why I didn’t use blade. The man that I killed at the start had the smell of blood on his thing, but when I checked the possession of the man whose neck I snapped, I was able to find a scented bag that was still sealed.

If they wanted to eliminate witness, I thought that they would have a spare in order to lure the insects once more. I found it just as I thought and tore the seal before throwing the scented bag to the distance. Several of the beetles attacking the two caught the scent and moved away from the two.

But that too was only a temporary measure. The insect lure’s scent would disperse after some time passed. The insects would gather here again so I would end this before that happened.

「──High Heal──」

The two got some leeway after several of the insects left. Elena who was following them casted healing sorcery at them.

The Cruzian boy who received the high recovery showed a surprised expression. Two beetles showed were excited seeing the new prey and turned toward Elena.

「──Water Ball──」

Elena fired water sorcery after the healing, stopping the beetles. The water ball burst and a lot of water scattered until Elena's feet. There she gathered even more mana and slammed her hands on the mud.

「──Dig Volt──」

The level 3 composite magic of wind and water element, Dig Volt ran through the mud and burned the beetles' nerves. They screamed and shook.

『GIIIIIIIIIIIIIII!』

Insect type monster had dull sense of pain. It was rare for them to escape from enemy smaller than themselves. They would keep attacking without care about some amount of damage. Even elemental sorcery of wind or water element couldn't inflict much damage on them. Even fire or earth element wouldn't be effective unless it had wide range. Even ice element could only slow down their movement. They were a troublesome opponent.

But it was a different story with lightning sorcery. It could bypass their hard carapace and directly attack the nerves of the insect monster that was insensitive to pain.

Elena had lost her fire element but, to make up for that she was putting in effort so she could use "lightning sorcery" that was a combination of water and wind as her attack method. Right now just activating it was still making her hands full and she also couldn't make it strong enough to defeat the beetle monster, but that was enough for now.

I jumped down from the building's rooftop like a monster bird with my cloak flapping from the wind.

My aim was the beetle that was stopped in its track. I stabbed my black knife into its neck borderline, then I continued with lobbing off the head of the second one.

Insect wouldn't die just from getting its head crushed, but they became unable to attack after losing their control tower. Sooner or later they would die.

Those two were still fighting at the street ahead, but the number of insects had decreased and the Cruzian boy got healed by Elena. Because he could protect himself now, the dark elf boy could finish off the wounded insects with his two short swords.

Because the insect's number decreased even more, the Cruzian boy could also join with eliminating them. And when only several wounded insects remained, the dark elf boy suddenly rushed out from inside their encirclement.

GAKIIINN!!

My black dagger clashed with the short sword of the dark elf who closed the distance like a gust of wind, creating a piercing sound.

「What're you scheming, woman.」

「That's my line.」

GIN!

We didn't lock sword. We moved apart at the same time while slashing at each other. Sparks scattered once more from the blades colliding.

The dark elf swiftly kicked the sand on the ground toward me. I took distance by rotating my back toward him while pulling out a knife from my thigh that I threw at him. The dark elf blocked it with his short sword.

「Aria!」

「Kamil!」

The voices of Elena and the Cruzian boy resounded. The dark elf──Kamil radiated killing intent as though to drown those voices. In respond I too switched my focus into lethal combat.

I assigned body strengthening to my speed and dashed forward, but Kamil met my rush with his sword. I didn't avert my eyes from the sharp blade and dodged it in a hair's breadth. Kamil's eyes widened for the first time seeing that.

Kamil jumped back to dodge my dagger that rushed at him. When I threw several throwing knives in respond, Kamil's posture broke and he lashed with a black chain from his sleeve. It struck down all the throwing knives.

It was a small weighted chain made from magic steel. The female evil race who I defeated at the village between mountains also used it, but it should be stronger than my pendulum in strength if he had a control skill. Kamil didn't pause and swung the chain in succession, smashing the ground and rock──

GAN!!

I read the trajectory of its tip that was swiveling in high speed and intercepted it with my weight type pendulum. They made an ear-piercing sound.

We both used similar weapons. The chain and string entangled with each other the moment we inhaled air.

Both of us didn't let go of our respective weapon and pulled with our left arm. We both sensed the mana of the others rising, but at that moment when we both took a stance for Battle Skill──

「Enough!」

「Stop!!」

Yells for us to stop entered our ears again from close by. Our blades stopped still right in front of each other's brow ridge as our Battle Skill ended up

unfired.

「Wait wait, Kamil!」

The Cruzian boy seemed to have finished dealing with the remaining beetles and cut in between the two of us. Seeing that I used string control skill to disentangle my string from the chain and stepped back fro the two of them. Elena came to my side with a grave expression.

「What's the meaning of this?」

Elena spoke with a really thorny voice from anger. She seemed to be very furious. Her whole body was filled with mana that was just a moment away from being fired. Static electricity was making her wavy blonde hair to stand on ends.

Kamil was wary toward Elena who was in such state and moved to step forward, but the Cruzian boy stopped him with his hand.

「I told you wait. We're the one in the wrong here. We were saved by them you know?」

「We didn't need it.」

「This is why you……, well, our bad, Melsenian ladies.」

「……tsu」

The words of the affable Cruzian boy made Elena noticed that the hood on her head was out of place. Her hand quickly reached toward it……but Elena stopped her hand and chose to keep glaring with her exposed face.

……Perhaps Elena too had noticed. For kist a moment, the boy turned a sharp evaluating gaze toward her.

「About the apology……can I take it that you're the one in charge of negotiating? Is it okay if I ask your name?」

「You aren't going to introduce yourself first even though you're asking a woman her name?」

「I guess……call me Ron.」

「Then, you can call me Lena.」

It sounded completely like a fake name, but there was no point telling them Elena's true name here.

It wouldn't be a problem if it was a name like mine that was a fake from the start to be registered as adventurer's name, but it would be wiser to not say Elena's name as the princess.

Even though it was a self-introduction that was riddled with falsehood, the boy who called himself Ron also didn't look like he was bothered at all. This time he bowed his head with a serious face.

「My thanks for your assistance. We caught the eyes of a slightly troublesome bunch you see.」

「Perhaps you two had done something bad to invite such reprisal?」

Elena spoke while playing ignorant about Munza Gang. Ron smiled a little bitterly.

「We just crushed one of their businesses. But the two of you will be alright……I guess? Even the men who were remaining here had been eliminated by the girl over there after all.」

Ron's gaze turned toward me. His eyes were slightly narrowed.

「You're really strong……this is the first time I saw a girl who can fight Kamil equally.」

「I feel the same with him over there.」

Kamil was strong. I couldn't accurately gauge his combat strength because he was wearing a cloak just like me but, I felt that he was as strong or even

more so than me.

I didn't intend to lose even if that fight continued but, Kamil must also felt the same. Judging from the feeling I got when we exchanged blow, he too was still hiding his trump card.

「Are there many skilled fighter like you two in that town I wonder?」

「How can that be. If strong guys like Kamil are wandering all over that town, I would have run away already from there. But if you don't know about that, does that mean the two of you only arrived to that town recently?」

「Is that important to know?」

Elena replied to the probing conversation and words coldly. Ron shrugged and smiled faintly.

「It doesn't really matter. It's just……you two look like a young lady and her bodyguard from somewhere.」

Elena too didn't change her expression hearing those words and put on a cold smile.

「My, just like the two of you?」

Elena and Ron were staring at each other while smiling coldly. Beside them Kamil and I were glaring at each other wordlessly.

「This is enough right?」

The one who broke the tense atmosphere was unexpectedly Kamil. He placed his hand on the shoulder of Ron who was looking at his with a hint of dissatisfaction in his face. Then he flicked a coin at me.

I grabbed it at midair and opened my hand. It was a large gold coin that I had never seen before.

「It's Karlfan Empire's currency. Now there's no problem right?」

「Isn’t it too much?」

If this was equal to Claydale Kingdom’s large gold coin, it was a really great amount for a reward to save them.

「It’s also to apologize for Ron’s rudeness.」

「Kamil, you’re saying that?」

Ron directed a half closed gaze with a pathetic expression toward Kamil who was shelving what he himself had done. The atmosphere was relaxing somewhat. Then Elena plucked the large gold coin from my hand and turned a slightly nasty smile toward them.

「Isn’t this too little to apologize for the rudeness?」

「……」

Elena was putting on a sweet smile like a blooming flower. Ron also smiled wryly and tossed another small gold coin toward me.

「What a really pricy help eh, well, it’s a cheap price for our life though. Then let’s leave from this place already. The insects are going to come again.」

「Yes, let’s do so. Are you fine with us being strangers even if we meet again at the town?」

「That way will be better but……well then, I have a little warning.」

Ron’s words made us who had started moving to end the conversation and leave stopped for a moment.

「Don’t trust anyone in that town. Doesn’t matter whether it’s kid or old man, they’ll be your enemy tomorrow even if they’re smiling today. Of course, that also includes us.」

The Girls

Claydale Kingdom, the Royal Sorcery Academy.

Two weeks had passed since the incident of attack of Princess Elena and she went missing. Because the kingdom prevented the matter from becoming public, the students other than the high class nobles and their staffs were ordered to standby at their own residents under the excuse that the academy was being repaired.

Among the students there were also those who couldn't move because their territory was far or they had no separate residence in the capital, but the number of students in the academy right now had been reduced until only 30% of the usual. With that the academy was regaining its tranquility on the surface.

The high ranked nobles and the crown prince who was a royalty were remaining in the academy in order to quell the confusion among the remaining students and to control the flow of information.

That was why it was necessary for them to show themselves in the open doing tea party and the like, doing their daily activity in the academy like usual instead of moving around busily so the other students would be reassured. But the people gathered there were far away from feeling reassured. A strange tense atmosphere that was not visible to the eye was drifting in the air.

「Clara……. I heard that you were giving harsh words to Licia. Why did you do such thing……」

「That's a strange thing to say, Er-sama. I was simply giving a lecture to the person over there about the "common sense" as a noble lady.」

Lady Clara Dandall put on a chillingly cold smile in respond to the words of Crown Prince Ervan who was calling another girl with a pet name right in front of his fiancée.

The rose garden in the seventh academy building was the newest facility in the academy. The building also had office for high ranked noble house. At the garden, five males and females were sitting around a table of white marble.

Ervan and Clara, the two who were betrothed to each other weren't sitting side by side. They were sitting facing each other. Sitting beside Ervan was Alicia Mercis, a viscount daughter, a middle ranked noble.

The figures of Mihail and Rockwell, scions of margrave houses who were the aides of the crown prince originally should be at the sides of these two, but they weren't anywhere to be seen in this place. But in exchange, the royal brother Amor and the grandson of the head priest Nathanital were sitting on their seats. They were looking at Clara as though she was an enemy.

Standing at a slight distance away from the table were their servants and bodyguard knights, and also maids who were dispatched from the palace, but among them was a Cruzian butler Seo who had an anxious face. His "lady" glanced toward him with a troubled face and he shook his head with a bitter face in respond.

Alicia──the girl who called herself [Licia] puffed out her cheeks a little in dissatisfaction seeing her young butler's attitude. Then she put on a scared expression and touched Ervan's hand under the table.

Clara shouldn't be able to see that from her seating, but she seemed to sense something and glared at Licia with a dark gaze.

「It looks like, she still hasn't understood anything.」

「Clara-sama, I never……」

Licia looked down with a sad face as though she had calculated the angle so it was visible. Ervan who became unable to meet the gaze of her terrifying fiancée changed the topic to somehow fix the situation.

「The tea is going to get cold like this. Let's reheat it. Someone」

He lifted up the completely cold teacup that was placed in front of Alicia to urge the maids to take it, but then someone who had approached near him without him realizing it took the teacup from his hand with white fingertips before splashing the content on Licia's head.

.

「Oh my, everyone, what could you all be doing over here while leaving me out of it?」

That act was just too abrupt that everyone including Alicia was dumbfounded. Meanwhile Carla who did that as though it was only natural was putting on a smile of genuine enjoyment with a pale face that had horrible dark circles around her eyes.

「Lady Carla, what have you done!」

Bam! Amor slammed his hands on the table as he jumped to his feet. He turned a sharp gaze toward Carla.

She poured tea on the head of a lady who was sitting beside the crown prince. It was only natural for her to be criticized after doing such thing, but the one who did that wasn't the girl who was the victim, or even the crown prince who was the person with the highest status here, but the only adult in this place, the king's little brother Amor. But Carla didn't flinch even when such person was glaring at her. She only put on an ironic smile.

「Can't the unrelated person please stay out of this?」

「What-!」

Amor was born as a royalty and he had never experienced being told like that until now. He was unable to find any word to say in respond and fell

silent.

Carla moved glidingly without any sound amidst the dumbfounded people and looked down on Nathanital who was sitting beside Ervan.

「Move aside.」

「Tsu……」

Nathanital fell off the chair as though he had gotten pushed away. Carla elegantly lowered her body on it. That action made the frozen time started moving again.

「Y-you insolent-!」

「My, your highness Amor-sama, how do you do in this fine day? Are Er-sama and Clara-sama also doing well?」

It was as though she had only noticed his existence for the first time. But, she ignored that existence that was right in front of her eyes and smiled only to Ervan and Clara.

Carla had the standing of a daughter of a count house, but she was the crown prince's fiancée who would become the second queen so she was treated as a semi-royalty.

That standing was still below the royal brother Amor and even after marriage she would only had the same standing with Amor as the second queen but, with the Gift that she had obtained, Carla was already standing above Amor politically.

Even so, Carla was still just the crown prince's fiancée. Other person might see it as her doing lese majeste with how she acted like this toward the king's little brother Amor. But Amor who had witnessed Carla burning the rank 6 Minotaurus Murder to death even if it was already dying at that time felt an invisible pressure when facing her. He could only endure the treatment by gritting his teeth without saying anything else.

「W-wait a second! Rather than that Licia, you okay? Someone! Bring a towel」

Ervan cut in between those two and put his hand on Licia's shoulder while calling out to the back. Then the girl's young butler hurriedly run toward them.

「What are you doing, Carla?」

Ervan who couldn't be said to have much charisma turned a strong gaze toward Carla who was sitting at his side. Behind him was Nathanital whose seat got stolen and then got ignored without even getting his name called. He was scared but he still glared at Carla while consoling Licia.

「Fufufu, I heard about how adorable Er-sama picked up a stray dog and came visiting only to take a look. Well, it was simply, simply smelly……I thought that the tea's scent might help covering it up but, a stray dog's smell can't be erased that easily it seems. Pray forgive my blunder.」

The men's eyes widened from just how outrageous Carla's words were.

「Carla……you-, how could you say something so horrible-!」

「Please wait Er-sama. I'm alright, so please!」

Ervan reflexively got on his feet, but Licia stopped him by clinging on him from the side.

「……Licia」

「Carla-sama is simply in a bad mood right now. Er-sama and Amor-sama and Nathanital-kun are treating me kindly, so I'm fine……」

Licia clung on Ervan's arm while pressing and rubbing her immature body on him. She slowly took Ervan's hand and casually guided it toward her own body.

「Oh my, that is a strange you are mentioning. You make it sounds like a gentleman who is getting infatuated with other woman despite already

being betrothed, is a fool.」

「……tsu」

Carla's mocking words made Ervan averted his gaze slightly.

「I never-」

「My my, this stray dog really like to chirp. Don't you think so, Clara-sama?」

「……」

Clara who had been quietly observing the conversation until then lightly glared at Carla when she put her on the spot. She then turned a scornful gaze to the men and Licia while standing up.

「I have lost interest. I shall take my leave right now. Please do excuse me.」

「Clara-」

With Clara standing up from her seat, Ervan finally remembered why he called Clara to this place──to question her about her true reason saying harsh words to Licia. It made Ervan suddenly stopped calling her. Clara's eyes looked slightly sad to see that, then she looked down on the men with a cold gaze.

「Er-sama, my opinion hasn't changed. It's fine to play with fire a little, but please be someone who know discipline at the very least. ──Also-」

「「……tsu」」

Amor and Nathanital looked like they wanted to say something back at Clara's remark, but Clara stopped them with a strong tone.

「Amor-sama? Regardless of everything you are here with the standing as a teacher, and yet to me it looks like you are only favoring a particular

student. A person who isn't even fulfilling his role as the royal brother, is there any meaning in that person being a royalty?」

Clara moved her gaze from the speechless Amor to Nathanital.

「Also Nathanital-sama, you too are someone who will serve as in a sacred occupation in the future. I wonder what will the head priest think if he become aware of how you are being so infatuated with a girl. And where could my dear brother and the scion of Melrose House are right now? Those two are personage who should be in the service of the next king you know?」

Amor and Nathanital gritted their teeth because of Clara's words. They couldn't say anything back because there was nothing wrong with her words at all.

In addition she was also explicitly criticizing why the member of margrave houses that should be Ervan's friend and his future aides weren't present here. It made Ervan pressed his lips together with a pained look.

There was nothing wrong with what Clara was saying. Even so their emotion was a different matter.

Amor and Nathanital were staring with eyes that were filled with hatred toward the noble ladies who spoke harsh words to them and slighted Licia who had accepted them as they were. To them these two girls were like "villainess" in a play.

In respond to their stare, Clara scoffed「Hmph」 as though to make a fool of them and she turned her back to them as she walked away. Seeing that slender back walking away made Ervan recalled the girl who had been together with him ever since they were little. He was making a face like a little kid who was about to cry because of their relationship that had changed completely.

「Then, please allow me to take my leave too. Er-sama……your face right now, it's truly so lovely. Fufufu」

Carla showed a happy smile toward Ervan who was making a look of suffering. She stood up and gently touched Ervan's cheek, then she whispered into his ear with a melodic tone.

「My dear pretty prince. Please suffer more, become even dirtier, struggle unsightly within the flame. If you do that then surely you will become a good king just as I like it. Your charred bones……I shall gather and swallow them.」

「Hih」

Ervan pulled away when he felt physical heat from Carla's fingers on his cheek.

It was something that would harm him and wouldn't be able to be glossed off as a mere blind passion but, the royal guards around them didn't know what Carla did, and even those who noticed got overwhelmed by the bizarre ghastliness that Carla was radiating. Nobody was able to move.

Carla's wish was to dirty Ervan. The pure and innocent him, betraying those who he loved and those who loved him, becoming dirtier and wounded, and then falling down because of his self-condemning thought. Watching that was one of Carla's few pleasure.

In the middle of that bizarre atmosphere, there was only one person who was different. Licia's eyes that were filled with dark light collided with Carla's gaze right from the front.

She too was an embodiment of darkness in the shape of human that was different from Carla. She was the monster of desire that was dirtying Ervan.

Even so, she didn't match that girl who was so striking like a blade that glinted in the darkness. With that thought Carla put on a smile that was like a poisonous muddy swamp.

「This was really fun. Let's meet again sometimes, Er-sama.」

.

「……」

The crown prince's two fiancées had left. Ervan couldn't lift up his face after hearing their harsh words, but then Licia softly touched his cheek that became red with burn.

「Er-sama isn't wrong. You are just a human, so it's fine to run away when it's painful. I'm here for you if you find it painful.」

「Licia……」

Licia smiled at him like a holy mother. It made Amor and Nathanital felt moved and sighed in admiration.

Under the table……she took the hand of Ervan who was still at a lost while she pressed her immature body on his arm. With that she held his arm in place even though he reflexively tried to move away. The moment his attention turned toward her, she softly whispered into his ear.

「I will……heal you.」

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「My lady, that was……」

「It's fine.」

Clara replied brusquely toward the words of her maid[Hilda] who were accompanying her on her way toward the carriage.

Clara had used her Gift [Foresight]. As the result of her calculation, she judged that it wouldn't be wise to stay in that place.

Her standing would worsen even more if she stayed in that place. Even so her heart would tear apart if she didn't say anything at all.

Ervan was only being deceived by that woman……the heroine. She thought that the kind Ervan would return to her side if she explained to him about the hypothesis that she reached based on her calculation, but her emotion rose to the surface and her persuasion didn't go well.

She didn't mind even if she didn't become queen as long as he returned to her. But, in reality Ervan was the crown prince. She had to be the queen in order to marry him.

She could endure most things if there was some kind of circumstance and Ervan's heart still belonged to her. But, Clara asked herself if she would be

able to endure if his heart was choosing someone else than her.

Clara's aunt the second queen couldn't endure that and became sick mentally. Now Clara wondered if perhaps the game Clara too also noticed that she wouldn't be able to endure that and became "villainess" in order to get away from them.

「What about that thing?」

「……I managed to procure it, but will you really use it?」

Hilda replied to Clara's question with hesitation because she was worrying about her master.

Clara was a former member of assassin guild who lost her home because of the incident with "Ash Crowned Princess" several years ago. She also almost lost her life when Clara saved her.

In addition to that Hilda also knew of Clara's weakness. It made her very devoted to Clara that she would even risk her life for her. She didn't only serve as Clara's poison tester, she was also trying to be useful by gathering information and the like within the academy.

The thing that Hilda procured was an illegal poison that was created using a unique method.

It was something that was left behind by an evil race person who was affiliated with the assassin guild in the past. It used human's magic stone as ingredient, so when the evil race person established the way to create that poison, she apparently destroyed everything because of her moral value, but the curse user who was with the guild at that time recreated that method and succeeded in making the poison, although it was only in small amount.

That curse user also got burned to ash along with the catacomb when the guild was annihilated, but Hilda who remembered about this poison managed to find it inside another storage where that poison was stored because it was weak against humidity.

「I'll use it. If everything can be ended with that then……」

「……As my lady wish.」

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「Licia, what's wrong?」

「I'm sorry, Nathanital-kun. I want to meet you alone no matter what.」

Inside a cathedral located in the academy. It wasn't a match against the cathedral at the capital, even so it had the size of a medium sized cathedral at the province.

This cathedral was managed by priest that was also dispatched from the capital's church, but when it wasn't in use, it was possible to be entered if using the authority of Nathanital who was the grandson of the head priest.

Although they were just students who were still 13 years old, it wasn't good for noble male and female to meet alone. But, the girl's butler who should be reprimanding her went to give report about what Clara and Carla did in the tea party, so he wasn't at the girl's side right now.

「Yeah. I also wanted to meet Licia.」

That girl, licia smiled sweetly. Nathanital felt healed in his heart seeing that and replied like that.

She was "special" for Nathanital. Even so if it was the him from before, he wouldn't open up himself to this degree toward this girl who was rumored to be raised by commoner.

Several months ago, an event that destroyed Nathanital's view of the world happened.

The kidnapping of the first princess Elena. It was the doing of a part of the knight order and they also dragged Nathanital into it. There a girl who was the princess's bodyguard saved them but, the girl slaughtered humans who were given their life by god. And when Nathanital tried to criticize her for

that using god's teaching, the girl told him to not talk about the weight of life using the words of "someone else".

He couldn't accept that. How could a child of god who was tasked to spread the word of god like him was not allowed to talk about god's word.

……But, the girl's words also stabbed into Nathanital's heart like a stake at the same time. His view of the world was destroyed and when he was about to lose sight of himself, it was Licia who gave salvation to his heart.

『You aren't wrong. Life and god's words are both important. There are people who got saved because of that, so you aren't wrong at all.』

The girl who called herself Licia wrapped Nathanital's hand with her own hands while smiling sweetly to him.

『But, let go of the tension in your shoulders a little. You are free. If you do that, we can also walk while holding hand like this.』

The warmth of that hand……it helped Nathanital regained his wavering heart. For the first time in his life he fell in love with the girl who "affirmed" everything he was unconditionally.

「Actually……I, want to save Carla-sama.」

「Eh?」

According to Alicia, Carla was behaving outrageously like that because she didn't believe in god. She talked to Nathanital that she wanted to borrow the strength of a certain person in the capital's church in order to help Carla.

「I believe, that Carla-sama's heart can be saved if it's with the help of Ursula-sama.」

「……」

Ursula. Even Nathanital knew that name.

Originally she was an orphan who was abandoned in front of a church, but she was devout to the teaching of the holy church, then she was awakened to light element, she saved many lives, and now the people were idolizing her as a “holy woman”.

But Nathanital also knew about her hidden side.

The Holy Church’s Guidance Corps──a corps that invited sinful people who didn’t follow the god’s teaching into underground of the church where the sinners would have their mind reformed. Ursula was that corps’ commander.

Nathanital didn’t know what they did underground. His grandfather the head priest told him that the corps was helping the sinners to open their eyes to god’s teaching, but he was forbidden to even get closer to the underground.

Was something terrifying being carried out there? It wasn’t like he didn’t believe his grandfather’s words, but he also didn’t want to proactively get involved.

The corps was a top secret matter that was only known by a handful of people even within the church. How did Licia know about it?

(……No, Licia is purely worried about Carla, that’s all……)

Ursula was said to be as strong as a rank 4 adventurer. If it was her guidance corps, perhaps it was possible to “educate” even someone as terrifying as Carla.

Even if it resulted in Carla never coming out of the church’s underground ever again……. Nathanital recalled the humiliation that he received in that tea party and agreed to Licia’s suggestion without ever telling her about the truth.

Even so it made him felt like he was committing a sin. Nathanital kneeled inside the cathedral due to his self-condemning thought and offered his prayer to god. Then something soft wrapped his head.

「L-Licia!?」

「It's fine. Nathanital isn't wrong at all. Believe in yourself more.」

Alicia kneeled in front of him and hugged his head. Nathanital felt flustered and raised his voice.

He tried to move away but the girl hugged him even tighter. Nathanital got his head buried on the girl's flat stomach and she gently caressed his hair. He gradually relaxed from her affection and hugged Alicia back as though to cling to her.

「If it feels painful……I'll sooth you.」

The girl hugged the boy's head inside the dimly lit cathedral while caressing his hair like a holy mother. She let out a faintly dark and twisted smile while the holy symbol of the church was shining faintly at the background.

Saint of Darkness

「A sinner is found.」

It was inside a clean and simple room that was modest but surrounded by pure white plaster wall. A woman who was in the middle of her twenty was smiling gently there. She was also wearing a plain but white priestess outfit.

Her beige hair flowed down smoothly until her shoulder. Her face wasn't flashy but still well-ordered. Added with her soft atmosphere, her appearance displayed neat and modest beauty that truly showed she was a "saint".

──Saint Ursula──.

In the legend of this continent, it was believed that [Hero] and [Saintess] were chosen by spirit when evil appeared in this world. Ordinary people wouldn't get called like that no matter how much virtue they accumulated.

But, Ursula who was abandoned in front of the church when she should still be sucking on the teat of her mother and raised in the church's orphanage grew to be a pious believer. She became a priestess because she had the element for light sorcery. Then she saved a lot of people with god's love and miracle. It made the people called her [Saint] thinking that she was the closest thing to "Saintess".

「We will make the preparation today. Everyone, is that alright?」

「「Yes, Ursula-sama.」」

Ursula's words were responded by the four females who were inside the same room. They were wearing the same smile as the slowly got up on their feet.

They were maidens in the age range from early teen to early twenty. They all had been saved by the holy church and gathered under Ursula to form the [Holy Church's Devotion Corps]. They had accompanied Ursula going around to various places and saved they unfortunate people.

「Before that, can I stop by to take a look at how the children are doing?」

「「Yes.」」

The maidens smiled happily at the words of Saint Ursula who was smiling gently to them. When Ursula started walking, the pure maidens who were wearing the same white priestess clothes followed behind her.

The believers who came for praying and the young priests were looking at the girls walking modestly inside the holy place with eyes that were similar to adulation and worship. Among them there were also some priests who looked at the girls with nervousness inside their gaze, though such priest was few in number. That was because they knew that the girls' current appearance was only the "surface".

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「Ursula-sama-」

「Everyone, have you been good kids?」

When Ursula showed her face at the orphanage inside the church, small children wearing a simple piece of clothes immediately rushed toward her with wide smile.

The children here were unfortunate kids who lost their parents from accident or sickness. Even the children who were crying and asking for their parents at the beginning could finally regain their innocent smile due to Ursula and the priests' selfless love.

「I'm going inside, so please take care of the rest.」

Ursula patted the head of the kids clinging on her, hugged and lifted them up in her arms, and cuddling and soothing them. Then she entrusted the

children to the maidens of the devotion corps and walked deeper inside by herself. She opened a locked steel door that was protected by church knight and went down a stair that led to underground.

The stair was very long and when the sound from the surface didn't reach her anymore, the white plaster wall changed to wall with black spots on it as though it had something sticking on it. From further inside there were sounds of objects clashing and sobbing voices of children.

There were chains and shackles that were attached on the wall, and restraining table that was dyed dark red. Ursula walked through a corridor that had small rooms with bars lined up at both sides. There were torture implements visible here and there. It was a place where instructor priests were forcing on harsh training on young children.

All the children underground were all kids who didn't even know their parent's face since they were born.

Here the children had the doctrine of holy church and the know-how to break human body efficiently beaten up into them. The teaching that what was being done here was the correct thing to do was also getting imprinted into them like they were baby chicks.

These children would become the next generation's guidance corps in charge of capturing those who went against the teaching of the holy church, and then breaking those "sinners" for the sake of "educating" them.

The children believe that was the right thing to do, even so they were beaten with "stick" that whittled down their heart. Ursula then embraced the children who endured such torture with a smile like a holy mother, in order to give them "carrot".

「My adorable "little sisters". Were you able to break a lot today too?」

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「Bibi……are you really going to do it alone?」

「……Yeah. I'll kill our lady's enemy.」

Assassination of Alicia Mercis──the one who volunteered for that mission that Hilda should be doing personally was the youngest Bibi.

Bibi had gotten saved by Clara together with Hilda. Doris and Haiji also had their family saved by Clara from predicament. They also felt indebted to Clara but, not as much as Hilda and Bibi who had gotten directly saved by Clara and were swearing their loyalty to her.

Also thanks to Clara asking a skilled healer to treat Hilda and Bibi's burn, there wasn't a single burn mark on their body anymore. Bibi wasn't used to the maid work unlike the older Bibi, so she volunteered to take the assassination mission in the place of Hilda who wasn't good in direct combat. This was a chance where she could finally be useful after her burn was healed.

The assassination would use poison but, the target was a favorite of the crown prince and the royal brother, so it was possible that she had special bodyguard accompanying her. Hilda also thought that Bibi would be more suited for this and she couldn't strongly oppose her volunteering.

「……I'm going.」

Bibi's whole body was covered with black outfit other than her eyes. She blended into the darkness without any sound.

There was "poison" in Bibi's hand. It was an inhuman poison that was thought up by an evil race person inside the assassin guild in the past and got completed by a curse user.

It could be used by making the target inhaling it in its powder form or dissolving and mixing it into food. Poison in general would have stronger scent the more potent it was, and its potency would rapidly weaken when coming into contact with air, but this poison had no smell or taste. It would definitely send the target to death if it managed to enter inside the body.

But, even this poison had flaw. The flaw was this poison was only effective against “human with no magic stone” inside their body.

This poison’s main ingredient was [human’s magic stone]. The fellow human who consumed this poison would have his blood reacted to the poison, forming pseudo-magic stone of indeterminate shape inside the heart, blocking the blood flow and caused death.

That was why even if this poison was created using monster’s magic stone, any stone would already have magic stone on their own so the poison wouldn’t affect them. It also wasn’t effective against noble because almost all of them used sorcery. But, Alicia Mercis who was a former commoner and still couldn’t use sorcery would definitely get killed by this.

Human like Bibi and Hilda who had poison resistance but had no magic stone was rare, so the poison would be able to bypass the girl’s poison taster. That was why they should be able to mix the poison without getting noticed.

.

Bibi evaded the eyes of the patrolling academy knight and sneaked into the dormitory for middle ranked noble student.

In this academy, students from low ranked noble house generally lived in dormitory. But, unlike the low ranked noble houses that were numerous in number, middle ranked noble could rent one of the small mansions inside the academy that were all built with the same design.

The security inside the academy had been increased after the evil race successfully infiltrated inside. Although most of that security was assigned to the area of the high ranked nobles. Even so directly sneaking into a middle ranked noble’s mansion was dangerous even for a former member of assassin guild with level 2 Stealth like Bibi.

With the increase in security, it became impossible to mix the poison using roundabout way. And doing the mission with multiple people like Haiji and

Doris would only increase the chance of getting discovered, which was not wise.

That was why Bibi ended up moving alone, but there was always a gap existing in everything.

According to the previous information that Clara gave her, Alicia Mercis had a bodyguard butler apprentice from black ops assigned to her as bodyguard.

It would be dangerous to sneak into the mansion and the kitchen, but that wasn't the case with the laundry. The linen building beside the mansion that was used jointly by the students had sheets and covers that were collected recently.

The highest quality things would definitely belong to students who were noble. There were still multiple other middle ranked nobles remaining in the academy, but even if the poison hit someone among them there would be no problem because they all had magic stone.

Bibi sneaked toward the linen building and approached to open the locked door.

It would be different in battle, but knight and soldier wouldn't be able to discover Bibi in the darkness of the night……or that should be the case.

「――!?」

Dan!

Bibi sensed a faint killing intent and reflexively jumped away from the door. A knife stabbed into it in that moment.

A boy with darkish skin was appearing as though he was oozing out from the night's darkness.

He was a Cruzian boy who was the butler of Alicia Mercis, the target. He was walking soundlessly as though he was gliding while pointing the throwing knife in his hand toward Bibi with a cold gaze.

「Who’re you?」

***

A black carriage was running through the capital’s street late in the night while making a little sound.

It had no noble crest on it, but if someone with deep connection with the palace saw it, they would know that the carriage belonged to Lester House whose head was also the head of the royal sorcerers.

Even though the day had grown late, the cheers and light from the bars in the capital wouldn’t cease until the bell rang once which signified that the day had changed. But, silhouette of people walking in the dark night wouldn’t be found anywhere at the area away from the main street near the noble residences where mansions were lined up.

The black carriage smoothly ran on the stone paved road. It then stopped at the rear entrance of the church beside the holy church’s great cathedral that was surrounded by planted trees. Then two maidens showed their figure from the church. They were bringing staff that was lit with light of sorcery.

The coachman looked entranced for a moment when he saw the maidens clad in the neat and clean pure white priestess outfit, but he then hurriedly bowed his head and opened the carriage’s door. A girl with sickly white skin and long wavy jet black hair appeared from within the carriage.

「We bid you welcome, Carla-sama.」

「Thank you for the welcome.」

Vast magic power and pressure were oozing out from within her body, in contrast with her faint vitality. The church maidens gulped seeing that figure that was like a ghost, and yet they put on their usual smile and bowed their head in respond to Carla’s unexpectedly normal greeting and smile.

「Please come this way. We shall show you the way to Ursula-sama’s place.」

Several days ago, a secret message from Ursula who was extolled as the holy church's saint reached Carla who was staying in the academy.

The content was roundabout and used a lot of vague jargons, but Carla could understand it. The message said that Ursula wanted to have a secret talk about the whereabouts of the princess and her bodyguard, and why evil race could infiltrate into this country.

Carla didn't fully believe the message. Certainly it was Carla who pulled the evil race in, but the evidences and witnesses had been turned into ash.

Even so if it was the holy church that had information network in national scale, it might be possible that they had noticed Carla's involvement. And so Carla headed toward the capital under extreme secrecy, thinking that she might be able to listen to some kind of interesting talk.

「Welcome Carla-sama. Allow me to express my gratitude for taking the trouble of coming here so late at night like this.」

After walking through a gloomy corridor where there wasn't anybody around, she entered a room that was prepared for visiting noble where a modest looking woman with beige hair greeted Carla with a soft smile.

「I don't mind, Ursula-sama.」

「Please take your seat over here.」

Ursula led Carla to a seat where the two of them would be able to sit face to face. The design of the room was simple with only white wall around without any decoration, but the floor that was a single piece that was cut from a huge rock had been polished until it was shiny like mirror. The sofa was so soft that Carla's body sank into it. It seemed to be a high quality product that even high ranked noble would use.

The four priestesses were standing at the four corners of the room. The scent of the tea that Ursula had personally brewed filled the inside of the room. After having some trivial talk, Ursula suddenly leaned forward.

「Carla-sama……the truth is there are some voices inside the church that are suspecting that perhaps, it might be Carla-sama who led in the evil race into this country.」

Ursula's gaze was laced with sorrow. Carla smiled thinly and tilted her head in respond.

「My, how terrifying. My appearance has grown because of my magic power, but inside I'm just a little girl who had only turned thirteen you know? I wonder which person was saying such horrifying thing about me?」

「Yes, yes, that's right isn't it? I also think so but, just between the two of us, among the holy church we have a department with specialist to question the spirit of the departed.」

「You mean wraith?」

Certainly purifying wraith could also be said as the mission of priest for the sake of saving people. But, the monster called wraith wasn't something that appeared that easily compared to other undead.

Undaed was corpse that turned into monster due to the magic stone remaining in the corpse getting polluted by miasma, and then it bonded with the residual thought in a place that was thick with magic particle.

But wraith didn't have body or vessel that they possessed. It didn't even have magic stone. It would be different if it was at monster producing location where no human ever came, but wraith wouldn't come into being unless there was a great amount of miasma and magic particle, or high ranked undead scattering those things at its surrounding.

What did she mean by a department that specialized in handling such wraith?

「I believe you are aware how sometimes there are people with very deep grudge to this world. Even their residual thought after their death would be incoherent and filled to the brim with repulsive madness, but that wraith

apparently was screaming its grudge toward the evil race and a certain noble daughter.」

「Hee……」

Ursula stared at Carla when she spoke the words noble daughter. Carla slightly narrowed her eyes.

「Something like drivel that a wraith spewed doesn't have any credibility at all but……the holy church, has a really interesting *spy agency* isn't it?」

Tension ran through the church maidens from Carla's remark. Ursula raised her hand to stop them. Then she wetted her lips with tea while Carla also took a sip from her steaming cup.

Most likely, there was really such a department, not one that specialized in purifying wraith, but one that used [Necromancy] to grant miasma somehow and produced wraith in order to obtain information from it.

Necromancy was taboo in this continent. Just having a research material about it from the past was considered a crime. It only sounded like a bad joke that the one doing such crime was the holy church that designated such act as taboo in the first place. Ursula was astonished that Carla managed to derive the most unlikely conclusion just from the short conversation here. At the same time she could see now how such a girl who wasn't even of age yet was really the one who lured in evil race to this country.

「As I thought what the young master said is true. You are truly an "evil" that is clouding the light of this country.」

When Ursula spoke that sentence, the maidens who were standing at the four corners of the room quietly stepped forward.

「Young master said that there is no need to kill. That it'll be enough to simply "educate" you so that you won't be able to go back to the academy, but just as the god will it, let's free aslotfor the *queen's seat* using this chance.」

Ursula accepted the request from Nathanital to “educate” Carla wasn’t because he was the grandson of the head priest. If he contacted the guidance corps without going through the head priest just because he wanted to use Ursula and her force for the sake of his personal greed, Ursula would mercilessly put Nathanital under her education too.

But Ursula had been told by the head priest since some time ago about the special order from the church’s upper echelon……from Fandora Theocracy where the headquarters of Thurs Continent’s holy church was located.

It was to put a maiden with connection to the holy church among the three queens.

The head priest had been scheming since several years ago to make noble daughter with connection to the church to become a fiancée candidate for the crown prince, but several influential nobles including Duke Fudale interfered from the side and it was the duke’s daughter who squeezed in as a fiancée candidate.

But there was still no need to give up. Ursula thought that there was still a chance to recover if she managed to maneuver the situation well after she heard about Carla. And so she used Nathanital’s request to do this.

Carla had wandering habit like diving into dungeon solo and the like, and even the crown prince had his hands full against her. It shouldn’t be too problematic if someone like Carla vanished anytime, unlike the princess. And then after that the church could also form connection with Count Lester who was similarly starting to find his daughter to be unmanageable and won him over to the church’s side.

After that if the church could find a noble daughter with light element who wasn’t too bright and Ursula handed her title as saint to her, the church would be able to get closer to their objective.

「Carla-sama? Can I ask you if the tea’s taste is suitable for your palate……?」

「……」

Ursula slowly stood up and looked down on Carla while the smile on her lips deepened.

Carla kept holding her cup while staying unmoving from the sofa. Meanwhile the four maidens of the guidance corps drew out stiletto and approached to surround Carla from all directions.

「Let me think……the poison of Sefriole flower. It's a nostalgic taste.」

「!?」

In that moment, one of the maidens sensed something and thrust her stiletto forward with a shocking speed.

The maidens of the guidance corps were all rank 3 light sorcerer and also warrior. When the blade that was thrust with such terrifying speed almost touched Carla's slender neck, a white hand with"pattern of black thorn" formed on the arm caught the maiden's hand.

GOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!

「———tsu!!」

Crimson flame blazed from Carla's hand. The maiden whose hand was still in Carla's grasp let out a wordless scream as half her body burst into fire. The abnormal smell of burned hair and flesh drifted inside the room while Carla took another sip of the tea that included the nostalgic taste that she had experienced many times in order to obtain poison resistance inside dungeon. Then she smiled mellowly.

「It has a very nice aroma.」

***

「I wonder if Bibi is alright……」

Clara muttered the name of the maid who was moving for her sake inside a dark room where there was no one else. She was looking up to the night sky outside the window. Her maid Hilda was staring at her with a pained look.

Hilda, Bibi, Doris, Haiji……Clara had a calculation when she saved them. It wasn't like anyone would be fine, even so the background and situation of these four girls were just right for Clara.

Clara could only fall a step behind because she was unable to completely investigate the "heroine" who was the princess of Melrose House. And so she schemed to create her own information network seeing that she couldn't rely on the black ops.

She found Hilda and Bibi at that time. It wasn't a lie that she sympathized with the two's situation, but they should be nothing more than "pawn" that she could use as disposable piece. And yet Carla had gotten slightly too close with them.

That was the influence from Clara's moral ethic in her previous life.

She was unable to completely become heartless, instead Clara showed her own weakness toward the girls. But those girls became her ally after learning that side of her, however it made her unable to use them as simply disposable pieces.

It wasn't her intention but, Clara's "weakness" made the girls sympathized with her and they would sacrifice even their life for her sake. However Clara who was already thinking of the girls as important people to her felt her heart pained by that reality.

Clara's weakness made Hilda and the other girls, Clara's devouts to decide to give their life to her, however Clara couldn't stop that because "she was scared".

Clara was scared of the heroine who would stole the person who was important to her.

Clara was scared of the pink haired girl who looked at her with cold eyes.

Clara was scared of "herself" above all else.

She never thought that she would become this fixated with Ervan even though she had learned from her previous life's memory about the fate of the villainess. Even Clara herself didn't understand how she turned out like this. Even though Clara should be taking action in order to avoid the fate of villainess after she remembered her memory, she was instead stepping onto the path of villainess by her own will.

Clara too didn't think of this world as [game world]. She was perceiving this world as a world that most likely became the basis for the otome game.

That was why she was terrified. Perhaps it wasn't that she reincarnated into [villainess Clara], but it was her reincarnated self that was [the real villainess Clara] who became the basis for the game. She was scared to recognize that.

But, just like the otome game that would go through different route depending on the selected choices, Clara believed that the future (route) would change depending on her action and there was a version of herself who couldn't prevent her important people from getting harmed.

What Clara feared the most was such foolishly sinful herself.

***

「Who're you?」

「Tsu!?」

Bibi suddenly got attacked at the area of the middle ranked nobles while she was infiltrating there. The cold gaze of the young butler who questioned her identity pierced her. She felt the cold sweat trickling down her back.

She had heard about this Cruzian boy from her lady. He was Alicia Mercis's butler. He was still young but capable. He was a [bodyguard butler apprentice] who was dispatched due to Mercis House's request to Melrose House that was the main house and their caregiver.

Clara said that this boy still wasn't that much of a threat right now, but after facing him directly, Bibi felt that he was as strong as her……a powerful fighter who had reached rank 3.

That strength wasn't something much compared to the "Ash Crowned Princess" who Bibi and others hated after destroying the assassin guild's north frontier district branch where they belonged to, or the "Rose Witch" who was dangerous to even approach.

But, someone with such level of strength only numbered around a hundred even in this vast kingdom. Someone who had reached rank 3 could be said as a professional in the path that they chose.

For a boy who was still around 12 years old to be that strong was unexpected even for Bibi.

That was exactly why she couldn't move immediately even now that she had gotten discovered and questioned, yielding the initiative to the boy.

(This is bad!)

Bibi finally turned around and ran away when she felt the killing intent that was bursting away from the young butler.

Even though there were a lot of people with high combat strength, only those with the resolve to kill and be killed would be able to radiate strong killing intent. This wasn't a mere bodyguard butler. Most likely he was black ops' [combat butler] that was reviled in the underground society. Bibi started running away when she made that conclusion, but something flew past in front of her and tore a hole into the wall.

(Throwing pebble!?)

There were people using pebble made from metal even among the assassins. The range and power were inferior compared to throwing knife or arrow, but in the hand of expert, it turned into lethal weapon that was difficult to dodge in close range.

「Don’t think that you can get away.」

The voice sounded emotionless. The young butler threw his throwing knife to cut off Bibi’s escape path.

(He’s specialized in throwing weapon?)

Bibi judged that her enemy was mainly using projectile weapon with pebble for close range and throwing knife for midrange. She picked up the knife that stabbed the ground and threw it at the boy, then she immediately unsheathed her dagger and moved forward to get into close quarter combat.

Clang!

「Tsu!」

The boy used his bare hand to deflect the knife that was thrown back at him. Bibi immediately stopped running when she saw that. At the same time the boy’s kick flew past and grazed her face cover.

「Kuh」

Bibi moved to back away from that sharp kick, but the boy smoothly spun while leaping toward her with the back of his fist whistling through the air. Bibi tried to parry that with her arm but the impact was fiercer than expected. She counterattacked with her dagger even while feeling reeled. The boy ducked to the ground to dodge that, then his foot spring up for a kick while his hands were planted on the ground. The small statured Bibi couldn’t endure it and got blown away.

「I’ll give you a painful beating if you resist you know?」

That Cruzian young butler──Seo rotated his feet and sprang back to stand upright. He then took a hand-to-hand fighting stance.

In the past little Seo was conceited with his own talent and didn’t train seriously, but he fell in love with a girl who was one year older than him and wished to become strong in order “to take responsibility”.

He kept training desperately day by day while dreaming to be reunited with the girl once more. He blew past all the kids his age and arrived at rank 3 before even enrolling into the academy although it was just barely.

He wouldn't lose against any ordinary adult. He could even fight against royal guard as long as he arranged the situation to his advantage.

It was around that time, he heard that his first love who went missing had gotten found. Seo who was able to finally meet her was made to realize that he was still just coasting on his talent.

Rank 4──a domain of "the strong" that couldn't be reached with just talent. A girl who was still in her early teen arrived there with just her own strength.

Furthermore she even defeated a rank 5 monster on her own. Her fame in the open was still small but, her existence in the underworld had grown so great that there was nobody there who didn't know about the girl.

After learning that, Seo painfully felt that he wouldn't be able to catch up to her just by doing the same thing. He switched to a fighting style that made use of his strong point.

Gin! Seo smacked together the gauntlets his arms were wearing that were made from magic bronze.

Seo's new fighting style was hand-to-hand fighting that made use of his unique martial art accompanied by the use of hidden weapons. He was hiding weapons all over his body that couldn't be seen because of his sleeves, shoes, and so on. His main weapon the metal gauntlets didn't only serve as offense but also to block enemy's attack. It was a weapon that combined offense and defense into one.

Seo sighed in his mind toward the spy that sneaked into this place.

Alicia Mercis was a viscount daughter, a middle ranked noble, and yet she was involved with the like of the crown prince and the royal brother, and she often spoke and acted in a bizarre was that was unthinkable for a noble

lady. Various nobles shunned her and the number of this kind of probing was rising.

It seemed the spy before him was female, but he could feel “desperation” from her that made her stood out from all the spies before this. He still didn’t know what her objective was, but her master must dislike Alicia very much.

(That’s why it’s troubling……)

After all Seo mentally felt the same. To be honest Alicia’s behavior felt unpleasant for Seo. She was intimate with the crown prince, the royal brother, the grandson of the head priest, and others, and yet she was wanting the same thing from Seo too.

He had reported it to the main house Melrose and Mercis House too, but with the royalties involved in this matter, the problem couldn’t be solved with simply expulsing Alicia from the academy.

But, although mentally he sympathized with the other side, his work was dictating him differently. Seo too had officially become a black ops knight, and if Alicia Mercis had involvement with Melrose House, for the sake of the main house there was no way he could let a spy escaped when it could prove useful to grasp other house’s weakness.

The opponent’s strength was the same like him, lower rank 3……but, rank 3 scout and rank 3 warrior were different in their role itself. He wouldn’t lose if he didn’t let his guard down.

……As long as nothing anomalous happened.

.

「Seo-kuuun, where are youuu?」

「M-my lady, please stop……」

That anomaly happened. Alicia who was the protection target ignored her servant’s caution and her head leaned out from the window side’s terrace.

「「!?」」

Seo and Bibi reacted simultaneously. Alicia who had experience of getting bullied by her fellow girls in the past wouldn't let a maid stay at her side unless it was necessary. She would invite male servant who would listen to her request into her room, and those servants who were of the opposite sex than her wouldn't be able to touch her to physically stop her.

Seo unconsciously wanted to click his tongue, but he swallowed that impulse. Even so Bibi moved in that short moment where Seo's attention was diverted toward Alicia.

Bibi felt indebted to Clara. She believed that she wouldn't mind to even risk her life for Clara.

But, that feeling was slightly different than the loyalty of Hilda and the others.

Bibi was someone who couldn't take action unless she was dependent to someone. She entered the assassin guild was also because she obeyed the words of someone who she was dependent to. She loathed the Ash Crowned Princess also because the person she was dependent to was killed, not because the guild was destroyed.

Bibi was even still looking up to Tabatha who had betrayed them and tried to kill them in a trap just because she was once dependent to her.

Right now Bibi was dependent to Clara and Hilda. That was why she was happy working for Clara's sake and she accepted this assassination mission in Hilda's place because she feared that Hilda might die.

She would kill the assassination target Alicia Mercis here. And then she would get praised by Clara and Hilda. Bibi wouldn't even hesitate to risk her life just for that. She leaped up without any hesitation.

「Wait!」

The pebble that Seo threw pierced Bibi's shoulder as she dashed. Even so Bibi didn't stop and threw the small jar in her hand toward the window.

Bibi was here for the sake of Clara and Hilda. Seo was here for the sake of the main house that was behind the protection target. That slight difference in their fighting spirit put Bibi on the lead and she obtained result.

There was the sound of something breaking──. Bibi immediately attempted to escape. Seo wanted to give chase, but the scream that came from the mansion made his feet stopped.

「Shit!」

After hesitating just for a moment, Seo rushed toward the mansion where that scream came from.

***

「High Heal──!」

Inside a room of the church at the capital, the burn of the guidance corps' maiden who got half her body burned by Carla was quickly healing because of Ursula's healing sorcery.

As expected from someone who got called saint, that healing speed was eye-widening, but the smile of Carla who was still grabbing that maiden's arm deepened. Flame burst out from her hand once more and burning the body of the healed maiden.

「KYAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!」

The hellish torture of being healed while getting burned made the guidance corps' maiden who should have killed her emotion to scream. That abnormal sight pressured everyone and made them unable to move. Meanwhile the flame's force finally won and the maiden's body was burned until only ash remained.

「You, the poison should be……tsu!」

The sweats that flowed out from the members of the guidance corps wasn't caused solely by the heat filling the room.

Carla calmly finished drinking the poisoned tea. Then he shook off the soot clinging on her hand while responding to Ursula's question with an unchanging smile.

The poison of Sefriole flower mixed into the tea had the effect of relaxing muscle. It was also used as medicine in small amount, even so it would cause the inside of the mouth to be paralyzed and the person became unable to chant. It was a troublesome poison for sorcerer.

That was exactly why when Carla decided to fight alone, she increased her poison resistance by consuming them, especially the poisons that might be troublesome for her.

But Carla was able to use sorcery not only because she had poison resistance skill.

「Subdue her! She should still be unable to chant accurately!」

With Ursula's command, the petrified guidance corps' maidens raised their stiletto and burst into action. Then Carla who was still sitting on the sofa started moving without any sound.

『Do I look like someone who can't use magic without even chanting I wonder?』

Chant had to be chanted to use sorcery.

Even when they had understood the chant's meaning and learned "magic" that was chantless, activation word was still needed.

Ursula and her subordinates thought with their *common sense* that they simply didn't hear the activation word when Carla used sorcery. With simple sorcery, even if someone could use it as magic, it would be very difficult to accurately pronounce the activation word in the middle of chaotic melee.

But that wasn't accurate. The non-elemental magic Battle Skill could be activated even by monster using their roar. That was because monster could accurately imagine the meaning of that activation word.

Although poison resistance skill existed, complete resistance couldn't be obtained. The poison was certainly still working.

Just like Ursula said, Carla was still not in perfect condition to use sorcery. Even so when someone had already used sorcery hundreds, thousands of time and could imagine it accurately, it was possible to activate the magic just like with Battle Skill even though the effect would weaken somewhat.

Even though her muscles were turning flaccid, Carla forcefully controlled her body using Soul Thorn.

She could also use Treat completely without chanting and erase the poisonous substance remaining inside her body.

The maidens who burst into action aimed their attack at Carla's shoulder or arm, places that weren't vital.

Even Ursula and her subordinates, the guidance corps of the holy church didn't have the authority that could freely harm a noble daughter who had become the crown prince's fiancée. They would imprison the problematic Carla, used drug and sorcery to "educate" her, then they would throw her out and made her withdrew from her position as the crown prince's fiancée. That was their plan.

But, Carla Lester wasn't so *decent* that she could be stopped by such half-hearted attack.

「「「——!?」」」

Pattern of black thorn undulated on Carla's white skin. The body that was controlled by the thorn sprang up and dodged the attacks.

Soul Thorn——the church was aware that Carla had obtained Gift that strengthened her sorcery, even so they didn't predict that it would also

affect her body strengthening.

Ursula and others thought that Carla was still just a sorcerer no matter how strong she was. Their eyes widened seeing Carla dodging the attacks as though she was flying inside the room. In that moment, Carla's spread out her arms widely like a monstrous bird and immense mana formed in her hands. Ursula sensed that and leaped backward.

「Everyone, get back!!」

Ursula's voice warned──but.

「──Fire Ball──」

Flame blast roared inside the room. The three maidens were burned to ash without even leaving behind a scream.

「How can this be……tsu!」

It was an insane act to fire something like wide range fire sorcery indoor. Inside the room that was enveloped in flame, the only one who survived was Ursula who was clad in vestment of mythril fiber and had quickly jumped back while using level 4 light sorcery──[Bless] that increased her physical and magical resistance. She raised a voice that was filled with anger.

From inside that flame, Carla who had blocked the flame only using her own mana that she radiated out showed herself. She glanced at the surviving Ursula before looking around with a puzzled look.

「No one comes even after I went this far. Have you perhaps moved them somewhere away else?」

Ursula had taken into account the possibility of battle breaking out when capturing Carla and moved the priests who didn't know the circumstance from the church to the lodging of the worship hall. From the start only low ranked priest and orphan were given their own room inside the church so it wasn't difficult to move them.

Carla emitted her mana and confirmed that there was no other mana source inside the church, but she suddenly felt mana in a deep place and turned her gaze below.

「My……there are still some below here.」

「You!?」

Ursula's eyes widened and she raised the mace that she was hiding. Then she dashed into the flame.

DOGOONN!

The mace's attack pulverized the oaken table that was enveloped in flame. Carla jumped down as though to mock that, then she slipped through the burned door and leaped out to the corridor.

「I wonder if it's over here?」

「Wait-!!」

Ursula chased behind Carla. She was hot on Carla's heel but she just couldn't catch up. For the first time anxiety was coloring Ursula's face.

.

The ordinary priests and orphans who didn't know the truth had been moved away from inside this church. But the members of guidance corps who were educating the next generation were remaining underground.

For Ursula who was an orphan, her only family was the people of the church. Especially the children who would become the next generation's guidance corps, they were her irreplaceable "little sisters" who would continue to correct the world with the holy church's light even after she died.

Carla advanced deep into the church, even further back of the orphanage, where she found a steel door that usually was protected by a church knight.

She faintly sensed mana from behind the door. Her finger that was filled with mana moved toward that door.

「Stopppppppp!!」

Even Ursula's grieving yell didn't reach her──

「──Lightning──」

Flash burst out from Carla's fingertip. Ursula immediately used her own body to shield the door and the enormous thunder that was fired horizontally pierced her. The thunder pierced through her and burned the steel door behind her. The steel became scorching red and burned the wooden material around it. Vast amount of white smoke rose up.

Ursula was burned all over her body and even inside her body, even so she avoided instant death thanks to Bless's magical resistance. She crumbled down while praying to the god.

「……W…hy……」

Why was an evil existence like this was allowed to exist even though god existed?

Why were they who had destroyed the holy church's enemies under the name of the god had to meet this kind of experience?

She hated it. Of this world's evil. And also the god who left such thing unchecked. And also the head priest's grandson who led this kind of monster into their doorstep. She hated them all.

Like that for the first time since she was born Ursula cursed the god and everything involved with the god as she was dying. Her unrewarded life closed its curtain with that.

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Seo was taken by surprise and allowed a foreign object to be thrown at the room where his protection target resided. He returned into the mansion at

full speed and rushed up the stairs before he opened the door.

「My lady!」

Seo also had poison resistance but he was on guard against unknown poison and covered his mouth with a cloth while firing sorcery into the room.

「──Gust──tsu!」

The level 2 wind sorcery blew away the poisonous substance inside the room to outside the window.

There wasn't any poisonous smell ever since he entered inside the room. Seo also didn't feel anything strange happening to his body. But inside the room, two servants who got called by their master inside were pressing their hands on their chest while lying down with ashen pale face. Seo could also see the silhouette of someone who seemed to be his charge further back in the room.

「My la……」

Seo was about to rush in when he stopped speaking midway.

「……Aha……ahaha-」

Licia was laughing while pressing her hands on her chest. Seo froze still without being able to raise his voice when he heard that strange laugh. Meanwhile Licia slowly stood up and turned around.

Her whole body was enveloped in the light of mana. Her lips were dirtied by blood that she vomited, even so she was laughing loudly with a terrible countenance. It made Seo unconsciously backed away.

「Seo-kun, please look! I can finally use light mana!
AHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAH!」

Blood left Seo's face and he gulped seeing that bizarre scene.

Alicia Mercis couldn’t learn light sorcery like in the game scenario.

That was why the progress of her capture was stalling but, perhaps it was fate’s mischief, Licia who was hit by poison to create magic stone inside the heart to block the blood flow managed to survive by using her abnormal tenacity to create magic stone of light in her heart.

The next day, she got recommended to be the holy church’s [saintess] by the royal brother Amor. Since then she began to vigorously capture the heart of the crown prince and others, which deepened the gap between the crown prince and his fiancées even more.

Like that, the academy that had lost the princess and the girl who served as a political and physical brake was heading toward even more chaos.

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「W-what in the……」

At the entrance to the church that was empty late at night, there was Nathanital who was trembling because of the faint strange sound that he heard.

He listened to the wish of the girl who he loved and made a request to the holy church’s guidance corps to educate Carla, but he was losing confidence in the righteousness of his action as more time passed.

Even though Carla had done horrible thing to Licia, was it really the right thing to do as a person, as a child of god to do something like revising someone else’s personality?

The target was still a fiancée of the crown prince regardless of everything. If he was going to do it, wouldn’t it be better to ask for permission first from his grandfather the head priest?

How was he going to take responsibility in case this was something that went against his grandfather’s will?

Ursula had also agreed so he wasn't the only one in the wrong. There was no way god would forgive human like Carla or Aria who made light of human life, so he shouldn't be mistaken…….

Even though he was thinking like that, Nathanital came here in order to ascertain the state of things. He secretly came alone so that the matter wouldn't get exposed to the public.

Just for today the church knight who should be protecting the entrance wasn't in his post. Nathanital felt anxious and worried because of that fact, even so he used the key that he got from his grandfather and opened the church's door. When he entered, he realized that there was a faint scent of burning and small amount of smoke drifting from deeper inside.

「S-smoke? Was there fire?」

There were also children in the orphanage. It would be horrible if they got harmed by fire, even so he couldn't find any adult around to report the fire, and most of all Nathanital couldn't think of any idea to explain the reason why he was here this late at night. That timidity made him went inside by himself.

It was then──

「……Hih!」

「Nathanital-sama, how do you do.」

Carla's slender fingers came out from the darkness and put a tight grip on Nathanital's face. Nathanital lost the strength in his waist and fell. Carla then started walking while dragging him like that.

「Gyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!?」

Flame burst out from the hand that was gripping his face. Nathanital screamed from his face burning. The next moment──

Buooon!!

Fresh air from outside flowed in through the entrance that was left wide open. Flame that burst up from inside blended with it and it licked through the inside of the church in the blink of eye.

Fire sorcery radiated out from the inside of the church and blew away the large door at the entrance. Carla was keeping her tight grip on Nathanital who was screaming and writhing while going out of the flame to outside. She turned toward the dumbfounded onlookers who ran out from the surrounding houses when they saw the church in flame, and smiled toward them with heartfelt joy.

.

The fire in the church that happened late at night was pacified after it burned half of the structures. It was thanks to the people who could use water sorcery from among the surrounding residents who were still awake and the priests of the hall of worship who came running.

The daughter of Count Lester, Carla was thought as the cause of the fire, but the holy church that was the victim in this matter feared that the assassination attempt and the education facility underground would come out to the public. After having a discussion with the royal family and Lester House, they decided to let Carla go unquestioned while announcing that the culprit was unknown.

But there were witnesses even though they were few. There was no shutting the mouth of people.

And most of all, there were nobles who feared Carla's insanity when she was in a possession of combat strength that rivaled a noble house by her lonesome. They reported their dissatisfaction and worry to the royal family, so his majesty the king announced that Carla's suitability as the crown prince's fiancée would be ascertained through the period of the present time until the day of graduation of the crown prince. With that this incident was settled for the time being.

Children of the Desert

「Where did you get your hand on this?」

That day, one of the clerks of Kirly Company, a man called “Pharmacist Jed” was facing a strange duo.

Kirly Company was one of the four factions that ruled Cutlass Town. They controlled forty percent of the food, alcohol, and daily necessities in this desert town. The company had various departments but, Jed was working as head clerk in the [apothecary]. The department bought the materials gathered by Hogros Company’s adventurer, processed them into medicine, and then sold the products to adventurer or wealthy resident for profit.

A strange story came to Jed’s place at such time. He was told that an unknown young woman came to sell potion.

“Apothecary” usually bought materials but didn’t buy medicine. Even so sometimes adventurer who was pressed for money or traveler wanting to sell their spare medicine would come to them. He would check the quality and if it was still usable, he would buy it with ten or twenty percent of the standard price, then he would sell it not to average customer but to destitute resident with high price.

But these young women left behind something that seemed to be low class potion for free.

Although it was low class, recovery potion could make weakened body recover its stamina, closed wound, and healed shallow wound in several days without leaving behind any scar in several days. That wasn’t all, it could also heal even sickness after the consumer rested on bed for several days as long as the sickness wasn’t anything too particular.

In this world where it would become harder to get sick or wounded the greater a person's mana was, recovery potion was the most universal medicine.

But, even the low rank could cost a silver coin. Especially in this desert town, it was a high class medicine that cost three silver coins.

The cause of that was, first the few available ingredients. There would be no problem at country or region with a lot of nature, but many of the creatures living in this desert were monster. It wasn't an easy thing to gather ingredient.

In addition the number of alchemist who could create potion was also few. The number of alchemist itself wasn't few, but an alchemist would rather work in normal country rather than this kind of lawless town in the desert where there would be safety and cheap material available.

There was no individual alchemist working in this town. Alchemist who came to this town was only second rate alchemist with no decent skill or alchemist with questionable past. But even such alchemist was fought over by the factions, and they were forced to work like work-horse to fulfill the demand.

Even such second rate alchemist who could only make low class potion was rare here. Naturally the product they created didn't reach the low ranked adventurer and destitute people.

Therefore the majority of potions circulating in the town came from the Kirly Company's export from Carlfan Empire, but a lot of them would deteriorate from the long journey of one month and the desert's climate. But, the low rank potion that those young women left behind didn't show any sign of deterioration at all.

「Where……even if you ask me that, is there a merchant who will tell other about their supplier?」

「Ha-ha-ha, you really hit where it hurts there.」

They were inside the apothecary's reception room. Jed who was also a merchant responded to the words of the woman who was sitting on the sofa by slapping his bald swarthy head and a playful laugh.

The potion that was placed on the table was a high class potion.

The recovery rate and recovery amount of high class potion rivaled level 3 light sorcery. But exported potion that had deteriorated would have its efficacy declined by 30%. Even so such thing could be sold for five small gold coins in this town, which was several times the normal price.

And yet, the high class potion that these women brought this time didn't have the slightest deterioration as though it had just been made.

The effect had been tested using the one that had been provided to him as tester to an underling who was on the verge of death from horrible sunburn.

If it was low class then one that hadn't deteriorated could be obtained even in this town, but how did one obtain high class potion without deterioration in this desert where even the ingredients for it couldn't be found?

(……So young.)

Jed's gaze sharpened slightly seeing the young woman before him.

She was a white skinned Melsenian which was rare in this town. It wasn't like there was none at all but a woman this young and fair looking couldn't be found even in the red district that Riezan Family managed.

At first she was wearing her hood to cover most of her face, but even Jed was shocked when the business negotiation started and the woman showed her bare face. She was like a noble with her blue eyes and blonde hair that had thin coloring. She was still young──it would be fine to call her a girl. Her appearance looked like a fifteen years old girl in commoner family, but it was possible that she was slightly younger than that if she had a lot of mana.

It was unthinkable that a girl who still looked a bit childish like this was a high ranked alchemist. In the first place there was no way something like this could be created here because there was no ingredient for it.

She should have some kind of secret.

Did she export the ingredient while using sorcery to retain the freshness? Or she had some kind of technology to transport potion across the desert without allowing it to decay? Or perhaps she used sorcery to maintain the potion's freshness itself?

There should be a secret behind this. What should be done to "steal" it away…….

「──tsu!?」

Jed suddenly felt an abnormal pressure and held his breathing.

Jed was a head clerk of Kirly Company that was one of the four major factions in this town, but he was going out of his way to have business negotiation with this kind of little girl because of the existence of her "companion".

The other person than the blonde haired girl……the other woman still wearing her hood while standing behind the girl. She was most likely her bodyguard. She was constantly clad in a dangerous atmosphere while keeping her vigilance toward the surrounding.

Jed too was this town's resident. He had experience with killing, and he had lost count of how many times he had robbed away other people's fortune before trampling on their dignity and dropped them into hell that was even more horrible than death.

A person like Jed felt that this single woman was "unusual".

The residents of this town wouldn't hesitate to kill. Because they knew they would be taken advantage of if they didn't do it first. That was exactly why they would sell even their dignity to protect their life.

The first thing Jed thought when he caught sight of these two was──it would become troublesome if he tried anything with them.

Jed also had bodyguard here. In the first place even the kids in this town knew that their family and friend would all get slaughtered if they did something to a head clerk of Kirly Company.

However even then, Jed got the premonition that his death was nearby, that he would get killed.

「……Then let's return to our negotiation. I can prepare four gold coins for one of these if you can deliver the product periodically. What do you think?」

「Let me think……I don't mind with that price. It will be delightful if we can continue this good relationship from here on.」

「Yes. Of course we will……」

.

The girls brought a total of five high class potions. They received two large gold coins as payment. And then they immediately left Kirly Company after that.

High class potion that a wandering merchant brought would net them one small gold coin at best. Even if it was in good condition and had selling price above one large gold coin, having the company bought it with the price of four small gold coins could be said as extraordinary.

Even such amount wouldn't be expensive at all if they considered the profit that could be obtained from those girls.

The room was filled with the sweet scent of the boiled tea that used a lot of sugar. In the end that tea was left untouched on the table. There Jed muttered with a broad smile.

「……Little girls, don't look down on Kirly Company.」

***

「I wonder if I failed……」

Elena who was hiding her face under the hood whispered while walking on the street.

Even Cutlass Town that didn't have public order wasn't that dangerous during the day at the main street. After all as long as it was a place where people lived, daily necessity like stall that sold simple food or cloth and string to create attire would become necessary.

The majority of the shops were affiliated with one of the four factions, so the look of the shop owners who had to pay very expensive management fee lacked luster. There were also few customers who came to shopping for their expensive product.

There were also a lot of people who steal or rob in order to survive. I only used my gaze to drive away the bunch who looked at us like prey before nodding at Elena's words.

「Perhaps. Even so we really don't have any other option.」

We sold potion in order to obtain connection and money.

To go to Carlfan Empire that was far away from this town, we needed to accompany merchant that knew the route well. For that we needed to create trust. Most likely we would also need a lot of money. I created high class potion using desert ingredient that I learned from master who was a dark elf, but it seemed that method wasn't common.

Our importance would go up with the fresh high class potion. We decided to use that as our weapon even knowing the danger it would bring us, but that Kirly Company's employee, I felt too much greed from him as a merchant.

「Should we sell it directly to Hogros Company?」

「Kirly Company is the potion supplier for the adventurer guild. It might be fine if it's just small amount, but selling large amount will make us their

enemy anyway.」

「For now, let's pray that Kirly Company won't do anything stupid……. Aria? What's wrong?」

「I smell death.」

Elena looked puzzled seeing I suddenly focused on one spot.

Even this kind of town didn't have corpse scattered around at the open. In contrast, this town that was familiar with corpse always dealt with it quickly in order to prevent disease outbreak.

But, I felt the stench of death at the open like this. This smell wasn't something that solely came from corpse. In contrast a freshly made corpse wouldn't give off any putrid smell. But this putrid stench could also be felt from people who were dying from disease or something.

「Aria, over there.」

「……」

Elena noticed a small silhouette lying at a corner of a gloomy alley. I also focused my sight with body strengthening.

「A child……still alive.」

「──tsu」

Elena got her breath slightly caught hearing the fact that I muttered.

What to do? We weren't that well-off that we could get involved with other people's life or death. But, it would leave scar in Elena's heart if she ignored this after noticing it.

Elena's gaze entangled with mine just for a moment. Just from that I walked toward the alley with Elena following along slightly behind me with a jog.

.

We entered the alley and looked at the wounded and beaten up child. Elena reflexively started to run toward the child, but I grabbed her shoulder.

「The child is-」

「Wait. It might be sickness.」

The child was covered in wounds but I judged based on the smell rather than that.

I didn't want to let Elena got closer in case it was an infectious disease. I took out distilled liquor with high alcohol content that had been distilled several times from my pouch. I spread several drips on palm to sterilize it before approaching the child and examined him.

Dark elf child? It felt like this was my first time seeing a kid since coming to this town. Even taking into consideration that he was a dark elf, he must be not ten years old yet. From examining this boy, most likely his sickness wasn't infectious based on his symptoms. I realized that it was a sickness that he got infected from getting bitten by insect that lived in this area.

It wouldn't spread through air so there would be no problem to get near him, but there was a risk of infection from touching this kid's blood for a long time.

「──High Heal──」

His wounds were visibly healing because of the level 3 light sorcery. My light sorcery prioritized healing speed compared to Elena's, but this was enough. Either way healing magic could only heal sickness that could be cured by sleeping and recovering your stamina in the first place.

「Aria, this boy is……」

「Let's bring him to a clean place for now. First we have to wash off the blood.」

This boy's wounds weren't from getting bitten by insect. Considering how far his disease had progressed, most likely he received violence from

someone who feared getting infected by the sickness before abandoning him here.

The perpetrator would be his family or his neighbor. But we could investigate that later, for now we should move. His wounds had healed by the sickness wouldn't vanish on its own. He might not died if he was given potion every day but, there was something else that I wanted to try.

I wrapped the boy's whole body with a hemp cloth that we stocked from this town in a way that wouldn't touch the boy's blood. Then I gently lifted him up with both hands.

「Are we going to bring him to the inn?」

「No, let's go to back there.」

We hadn't seen any children in this town. In that case perhaps they were staying at the slum that was distanced from the main street. As I walked toward that direction, I caught sight of someone familiar running from the other side of the alley with ragged breath.

「You, what are you doing with that kid……」

「Is that your business?」

That boy──the dark elf Kamil glared threateningly at me when I said that to him. He slowly pulled out his short sword.

「Hand over that kid……-」

Kamil had never showed that much emotion to us……no, Kamil who didn't direct any interest at us before was directing emotion of irritation toward us for the first time.

「……If I refuse?」

「Die!」

The boy in my arms stirred slightly in respond to the killing intent from Kamil.

Kamil shot off like arrow in that moment. Before his blade reached me, I who was separated from Elena stomped my heel on the alley's wall and ran up while still holding the boy. I blocked Kamil's short sword with my heel's blade as it slashed through.

Clang!

「This kid will die you know?」

「Let go of him!」

Fast. Kamil sped up even more when I talked as though I was taking this kid hostage. He swung his blade, I also used my heel's blade and got up the wall even more to dodge the blade while throwing a hidden weapon from my Storage with only a swing of my wrist.

「Kuh」

Kamil tried to give chase using only his physical ability, but he fell down at the same time when he deflected the thrown weapon.

I see……he's strong as I thought. I felt that Kamil surpassed me purely in status. But, that wasn't it. The threat that I felt from him was…….

「That "sword" huh.」

「Tsu!」

Kamil's eyes widened from my words.

The slight discomfort that I felt from him……it was so small like when I had forgotten to cut my nail. Kamil also had weighted chain, and surely he could use sorcery too as a dark elf. But, he couldn't use them with the kid in my hands.

He was unexpectedly a good person? More soft-hearted than his impression hinted? Anyone would ordinarily think that. But if he had that much strength, then surely he had a bit more trick to use.

His experience in bloody battlefield was lacking compared to the threat that I felt from him. I guessed that the secret to that lied in the mana laced rugged short sword that he was holding.

「For you」

「──tsu!」

Kamil started to climb the wall once more. I threw the boy to him.

He quickly caught the kid and lost his balance. I erased my presence and drew out my knife before raising it behind him──

.

「Stop!」

Elena's voice echoed inside the alley just before the blade touched Kamil's neck. I quickly kicked the wall and landed beside her.

At that timing Kamil opened the distance while still holding the boy. He glared at me. I silently accepted it while Elena sighed a little and took a step forward.

「That child is covered in blood but his wounds are healed. We aren't the one who harmed him. We simply healed him because we couldn't bear to see him die.」

「……」

Kamil looked doubtful hearing that explanation, even so he moved his gaze to the boy. He saw that the kid was covered in blood but there was no wound underneath. After he understood the misunderstanding, his lips twisted, even so he squeezed out some words from his mouth.

「……Sorry.」

「I accept your apology. After all we were also partly at fault for acting in a way that invited misunderstanding.」

Elena turned her gaze to me. I nodded slightly.

I wouldn't say that Kamil and his friend Ron were evil, but whether they were trustworthy or not was a different story. Elena too understood that he could be trusted to some degree when she saw me handing over the kind, but she was thinking that it was me then I should be able to handle this a bit more peacefully.

But, there was no need for our side to go through the trouble of going as far as showing our softness.

It wasn't like Elena and I liked to act like this. But, Elena had the duty to return to the kingdom, and I had a reason to protect her.

In order to protect Elena physically and mentally, I threw away all softness to the ditch.

「Do you have a way to treat that kid's sickness?」

Kamil moved to open more distance from us while carrying the child, but his feet stopped.

「……Is that your business?」

Kamil threw the words that I said at the beginning back at me. I nodded slightly to him.

「It's not my business. Even if I have the way for that.」

「……」

Kamil looked at me once more when I said that.

I had no intention of getting friendly with him. I had no intention to get involved any further with them if they had a way. But the child was innocent. If his life could be saved without getting friendly with them then that would be great.

This was the greatest concession we could make in order to not create any weakness.

From Kamil's perspective, it must be difficult to believe me with how doubtful he acted. He was behaving like that so it was natural. That was why I also forced a concession to him in order to not get friendly with him.

「……It's not free.」

「Alright.」

***

It was outside the town──a location where it was mostly rocky place. A small hut was standing there.

「Kamil! How's Noi!?」

「Chako, Noi is still alright.」

The small hut was only there to protect from the sunlight. Coming out from it was a cat beastgirl who was still in the middle of her teen.

Noi must be that dark elf boy's name. The girl called Chako was a beastman so she didn't seem like his family, but seeing how relieved she was after Kamil explained to her that Noi wasn't injured despite all the blood, I could see how she was thinking of him as her family despite the difference in race.

「Umm……those people?」

「……They were the one who healed the wound.」

Kamil's introduction was half-hearted and short. Even so Chako hurriedly bowed her head to suspicious people like us who were hiding our face.

「T-thank you very much! But, we don't have anything to pay……」

「This guy will pay us so it's fine. Rather than that do you know that this kid is sick?」

「……Yes.」

Chako talked to us haltingly.

They were homeless orphans living in this town. Those who were thrown away by their parents because they didn't have enough to live anymore. Those who were left behind because they would be burden when running away from this town. Those whose parents were killed in gang war, etc. In this town there were so many possible reason that could be thought of.

Even such children would steal food and money from other children who were weaker than them. They used the corpses of the weak as stepping stone to grow into adult of that town. That was why the weak children leaned on each other in order to survive. They were living in a rocky place like this where death was just a step away so others wouldn't steal from them.

It was then Ron and Kamil accidentally noticed Noi who was the same race with Kamil and the predicament that she was in. They then helped the children with food and other things.

Other than Chako and Noi, there were also two other children here. An infant dog beastman and a small dwarf girl with slightly good built was it?

Even with Kamil's aid it still wasn't enough to feed everyone. In the first place there were many children like this around the town.

In order for the children to live, the oldest Chako gathered fibers from the succulent plant around here and made cheap shoes with that. She sold that

to earn small amount of copper coin every day. As for Noi, he had work of taking care the beetle larva that was bred in the town.

The larva of giant beetle had high nutrition value. It was an important food source in this town. But, giant beetle was monster and even its larva was dangerous. It was exactly because it was a dangerous job that even an orphan like Noi could work there, but Noi got bitten by a beetle larva and he unfortunately got sick from it.

Noi's health was declining bit by bit and he realized that he was sick. Chako and the other children were worried that he might be sick, but Noi lied to them and kept working in order to fed the children who were younger than him. That was two days ago.

From here was just my conjecture but, the employer noticed that Noi was sick and beat him up before tossing him into that alley. Most likely hired orphan getting sick in the job was already within their expectation, and each time a child got sick they would get killed like this.

「……"Lena", put water into that jar. Chako? Get me some cloths.」

「Yes.」

「Y-yes」

After the two replied back I ripped off Noi's clothes. I handed the bloody clothes to Kamil who went out midway because of bewilderment and told him to burn and buried it in the desert.

The infectiousness of this disease was low but it would still be better to burn it. After all there was no guarantee that Clean would disinfect it. I splashed the water that Elena produced with magic on Noi and wiped the blood using the rag that Chako gave me. I told the returning Kamil to burn the rag and chased him out.

Next would be a sorcery that even I had never tried before. It would be better if factor that could disturb my concentration got removed as many as possible.

「……Are you okay?」

「I'm doing it. ……[Treatment] ──」

Light of magic radiated from my hand──.

Level 4 light magic, Treatment.

This spell didn't recover stamina or heal wound. It was a sorcery to heal sickness.

Just like Treat that couldn't do anything unless you understood the type of poison, Treatment wouldn't have any effect unless you understood the sickness.

Only my light magic was still level 3. Level 4 light sorcery was Treatment and Bless, but people with higher mana would be harder to catch sickness, and the effect of my pink hair made me unrelated with sickness itself, so I didn't have any sense of danger that made me felt it was necessary to have level 4 light magic. Even though I was using magic instead of sorcery, I couldn't use it until now.

But, level 4 light magic would definitely become necessary too for my fight ahead.

Of course Bless that increased magic resistance and physical resistance was important, but it also would be important to achieve my ideal──the ideal of master and me that master wasn't able to achieve, to become the true "War Demon".

And then, the power of *two sorceries* that master sought──.

I would obtain even more "strength" here.

.

「……Do you succeed?」

「No problem.」

Kamil talked to me with a conflicted face when I came out of the hut.

The result was that Treatment activated and Noi's sickness was healed. I concentrated too much that I was tired, so Elena and others told me to rest and sent me out. I left the rest to them.

I think Kamil was looking conflicted because of his discontent from me pushing off chores to him and driving him out from the hut, and also because he felt grateful to me for treating Noi's sickness.

Being able to use level 4 light sorcery was at the level of holy church's high priest. There should only be ten odd people of them even in Claydale Kingdom.

I heard that in Cutlass Town, Hogros Company and Kirly Company had one each such person. Asking healing from such people would require trust, sufficient connection, and more than ten large gold coins at the very least.

I demanded one large gold coin to Kamil for the treatment this time. I would be fine even with just one small gold coin, but I asked that amount for the sake of their pride too.

Kamil's attitude was bad and he was deeply distrustful, and yet he wanted to pay his debt like this. It made me felt that he unexpectedly had good upbringing.

「……Sorry. I'm in your debt.」

「Don't mind it.」

Just this time Kamil thanked me honestly. I also lightly waved my hand telling him to not mind it. When I took off my hood in a tree's shadow to dry off my sweaty hair, his long-lashed eyes widened like saucer seeing that.

……Come to think of it, I guess this was my first time showing my face to him.

「Pink……blond hair?」

「Strange?」

「No……it's rare but not strange.」

For some reason Kamil averted his gaze from me and shut his mouth as though searching for the words to say. Was there something? If there was something that bothered him, I'd also said the thing that was in my mind.

「I guess. An adventurer who has magic sword, or dark elf with lighter shade of skin, they are rare but it's not like they don't exist.」

「……」

Kamil fell silent and stared fixedly into my eyes. Even wild animal might ran away against that strong gaze. I faced it on wordlessly for almost a minute when he moved his gaze away and let out a very long sigh.

「How did you notice?」

「Your experience is lacking.」

I didn't say what experience. My words could be interpreted in various senses. Kamil seemed to sense something from my words and he looked discontent again. We both stayed quiet for a while and time passed before he started murmuring.

「How old do I look like?」

「If you're a dark elf……around thirty?」

His appearance looked similar to me, a human who had just become of age. But a race with long life span like elf should actually be far older than they looked. Kamil silently shook his head when I said my thinking to him.

「I'm fifteen. I have human blood in me just like you guessed. Besides your body growing more mature the more mana you have is the same whether for human or dark elf.」

「I see……」

「I was told that the human mother who gave birth to me……my mother had beautiful pink blonde hair.」

「……」

There were light red hair color and hair color that was close to pink, but only women who directly descended from Melrose House could be said to have pink hair color. Was his grandmother a woman of Melrose House who married into other family?

If that was the case……then perhaps he was blood related to me.

「This magic sword, I heard that my dark elf father, gave in order to protect my human mother.」

Kamil touched the handle of the magic sword while looking slightly lonely.
……As I thought it was a special magic sword.

「Your mother?」

「……Killed. By dad's other wife.」

「That so……」

I felt more anger than sadness in Kamil's voice.

「And your parents?」

「They died protecting me.」

「……I see.」

Slight anger also oozed from my voice. But that anger wasn't directed to the monster that killed my parents, but the otome game that was my "destiny".

What was Kamil's anger directed at? Was there some kind of reason he was helping the orphans and also getting into a fight with Munza Gang?

It wasn't something that could be asked. We sat on the ground while staying quiet and not stirring at the slightest until Elena and Chako came for us.

***

Two days later, Elena and I were heading once more toward the small hut of the children outside the town.

We entrusted those children to Kamil or Ron. We shouldn't get too involved with them. But Elena had gotten close with the dog beastman and dwarf infant in that hut. It seemed she was concerned with the children's food situation.

The succulent plant in this area was highly nutritional, and they shouldn't get hungry by eating that, but they would get sick easily if they didn't eat meat or grain.

It was slightly expensive, but we bought thinly sliced meat of a livestock that was similar to sheep, not the insect that the poor ate. But we felt that something was a bit out of place as we headed to the rocky place.

「Aria-」

「Wait」

Elena was going to rush off but I stopped her with my hand and stepped forward. Noi who should have recovered why collapsed in front of the hut. He was still alive. My eyes could see that there was still mana remaining in his body, so he could still be saved if he received treatment quickly.

Even so I stopped Elena because three beastmen showed up from inside the hut.

Beastman……Munza Gang huh.

「Took you guys long. The alchemist woman who healed this brat is you right?」

「……Where's Chako?」

Two of the beastmen were holding two infants in their arms, perhaps as hostage. The children were so scared that they didn't even make any sound. They must have seen something really terrifying. Elena was holding her breath seeing the situation from behind me.

Also why were these guys thought that we were alchemist? How did they learn that Noi's sickness was healed?

「That little girl is at our place right now. Doon't worry, nothing bad is gonna happen to her if you two come with us quietly. If you can use potion to heal sickness, we'll be able to get a lot of brats that can be sold to Riezan Family like that woman.」

A beastman with fur that looked like black tiger laughed after saying that. The beastmen who were holding the captured children also laughed.

I stared at them──and the children. I lit a small flame in my heart.

Are you guys……fine like that?

「I'll take you to meet with her. So don't resist──」

「You're just going to cry?」

The beastmen frowned in puzzlement when I spoke those words clearly.

「What, you, what did you say──」

「You guys are fine with getting pushed around?」

The dwarf lifted up her face.

「You really aren't mad?」

The beastman infant gritted his teeth.

The men showed anger on their expression when I said those words over their voices.

「Shut up, you woman-!」

.

「In order to live──fight」

.

「Gya!?」

You guys didn't notice? That the children had stopped crying. That they decided to fight on their own will to protect their family.

You guys underestimated the children too much. Even infant could kill if they had fang.

The children bit the men's arms. I pointed my fingertip in that moment when they were taken by surprise.

「──Pain──」

「────tsu!?」

The beastmen froze. I glided and planted my black dagger between the eyes of the man holding the child, while my black knife stabbed the skull of the other man. Then I took back the two children and gently put them down on the ground.

「Wha──」

The black tiger man was still petrified by the slaughter that happened instantly. I glided toward him and broke the wrist of his right arm that moved his weapon with a chop. I also kicked the right knee of the man who was standing still so it broke to the opposite direction.

「──GYAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!?」

The man rolled around on the ground while screaming in pain. I stepped on his face and shut him up with my pressure and killing intent while looking down on him coldly.

「You'll take me to meet with her. So don't resist.」

Desert Rose

「Lena. Just in case, bring the children and evacuate to *outside.*」

「……I understand.」

Elena guessed what I meant by *outside* and she nodded with a conflicted face.

The wounded dark elf boy Noi was healed by Elena's light sorcery. We were waiting for him to wake up because even our inn couldn't be said as safe anymore.

We had created a simple base outside the town in preparation for when it was needed. It also had food though few so there would be no problem to stay there for several days.

When Noi woke up, he said that he would also come with me when he heard that Chako was kidnapped but…….

「No need.」

「B-but……」

There was anxiety in Noi's face. He was the big brother of the small children. He must have believed that he had the duty to save the big sister of their family. But, he was mistaken.

「Your responsibility is protecting these children. Don't mistake the place where you should risk your life.」

「……Yes.」

My worry hadn't disappeared even after the children had showed the will to fight. Noi nodded to me firmly after looking at the small children clinging on his clothes while desperately holding back their tears.

I saw off the back of Elena bringing the children away from this place, then I walked toward the other person still remaining in this place.

「Sorry to make you wait.」

「Bitch……tsu!」

His position was slightly different than before. Perhaps he tried to escape. The tiger striped man whose right knee and right wrist were broken was lying on the ground. Even so he growled like a tiger when I approached him. He used his remaining left foot to kick at me.

Combat strength wise he was around lower rank 3. It was splendid that he still had the will to fight with that injury, but in that case I would treat him accordingly.

I kicked up his foot that tried to kick my right leg. And then the same foot stamped down to crush his ankle.

「GUGYAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!」

「Where did you take Chako?」

My tone contained no anger or hatred. I simply emitted pressure while asking the question. The man's face convulsed with anything other than pain for the first time.

「Y-you……」

「You planned to show me the way from the start right? Also where did you hear that we healed the sickness from?」

「After doing this to Munza Gang, this town──GYAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!?」

「That's not what I asked.」

I grinded my foot on his broken ankle. The man wouldn't talk even with this because he feared retribution from Munza Gang. I broke his left knee next with a kick.

「Gugii……GYAAAAAAAAAAH!?」

The tiger man fainted from intense pain. I woke him up forcefully with different pain. The man's killing intent dispersed from the terror of his body getting broken bit by bit.

「……S-sto……I don't know……the young head……」

「There was someone who came to you right?」

The tiger man's heart finally broke after I crushed his last remaining safe left arm.

After asking the necessary information, I thought that there was defect in that information. I kept the man alive and dragged him by his collar toward the town.

***

「Aria!」

When I got close to the town, I heard my name got called by a silhouette that was running this way from the town.

People who called me by name in this town were few in number. And the number of people who would walk on the path toward that small hut was even fewer.

「Kamil and……Ron?」

Kamil's face was exposed but, the other person whose face was hidden under the hood must be Ron. The two ran toward me and their eyes slightly widened seeing the tiger man with broken limbs.

「I heard that Munza Gang went to the hut of Chako and others-」

「Don't tell me, this man-?」

It seemed the two ran this way after they heard the danger approaching the children.

From what they told me, it seemed that Munza Gang's thugs also came to their place and attacked, but one of them laughed mockingly at the two after they were defeated and hinted that the children also got attacked.

「We managed to save the children but Chako was taken.」

「Chako is……then I'll go.」

「Wait Kamil.」

Ron grabbed Kamil's shoulder before he could rush away. He removed his hood and looked at me with a serious gaze.

「Aria……is it? Thank you. I had heard about you two from Kamil. But, why are you two going this far for some unknown children?」

Ron's question was certainly natural. Even I was suspecting that these two had ulterior motive for aiding the orphans without asking for anything back.

「You're asking me that?」

「……I guess. Sorry.」

Ron honestly bowed his head to me after seeing that what we did was no different from what they themselves had done.

There was no reason. I could use some flowery words to dress it up but, if I was forced to put into words this subtle emotion that couldn't be described with speech, it was simply that we couldn't pretend to not see what we had seen. ──That was all.

「If Lena……your friend is staying together with the children, they should be fine for the time being. We also have information. We're in conflict with Munza Gang after we destroyed their business but, apparently Kirly Company is also involved this time.」

「That matched my information. It's likely to be related with our situation. I think they thought that it was our potion that cured the sickness.」

That head clerk called Jed, I thought that he was a merchant who would be a bit cleverer than this but, if he was prioritizing greed more than profit, then he was just a thug of this town after all.

……No, perhaps he had thought about the profit and emotional benefit, and reached the conclusion of 『taking away everything』 as befitted this town. A lot of powerful people was prudent but, among them there were also fools who misunderstood the organization's strength as their own strength.

「I'm going to take Chako back.」

「Got it, Aria. We'll also……」

「No, rather than that there's something else that I want to ask you two to do.」

***

The slum of desert town Cutlass. The whole town was like a slum, but this area was where the poorest were living. It was a lawless area where violence was truly the only rule.

「……u……aa……」

The crippled tiger man who was alternately fainting and waking up moaned.

Under the blazing hot sun that was at its peak, buildings that were made from soil and rock lined up the surrounding. I could feel some gazes like predator targeting a prey from inside those half crumbling buildings toward me who was walking in the middle of the street dragging a man.

There was nobody attacking even though I wasn't emitting any pressure. Most likely they had noticed that the tiger man I was dragging with me was a member of Munza Gang. They couldn't gauge my strength that had half killed such man.

I kept walking while letting the killing intent that was like heat mixing with the atmosphere washed over me. Then a stone mansion that was larger and grander than the other buildings came into my view.

So that was the mansion of Munza Gang's boss who was in charge of this area.

At first my plan was to attack stealthily to take back Chako, but I instead came from the front. Perhaps because of the killing intent that was filling the surrounding, the cat beastman and dog beastman who were guarding the gate pointed their spear toward me who was approaching them with the man dragged behind me.

「You bastard, who are you!」

「Know that this is Batil-sama's mansion……big bro!?」

One of the guards realized who was the man behind me and raised his voice. The tiger man woke up hearing that voice. Light of hope lit up inside his eyes and he raised his voice to clamor.

「……T-this bitch is that woman! Tell the young head! Gyahaha, it's over for you, woman! Do you know how many people are here──」

「Noisy.」

「Goooh!」

I crushed the man's throat with my heel that had a plate of magic steel slotted in it. I had no more use of you.

「Bastard!」

The cat beastman who called the tiger man big bro just now charged at me with his spear after seeing him vomiting blood. I instantly did body strengthening that was focused to muscle power and tossed the tiger man to the spear's path.

「Wha-!?」

「――――tsu!!」

The guard's spear stabbed the man's heart from behind. The cat beastman froze for an instant seeing that. I grabbed his head in my hand and slammed it on the dry ground.

「――E-enemy attack!!」

The other guard whose life was instead spared because he couldn't move howled so loudly his throat might get torn.

Sounds of rushing and presences mixed with killing intents swelled up from inside the mansion. Dog and cat beastmen surged out as though to blast away the entrance's door with spear and sword in their hands. They bared their fangs with growls at me who was standing beside two corpses under my cloak.

「What do you want here-!」

「Big bro said he's that woman-」

「Don't fuck around! Don't think you can die easily after picking a fight with Munza Gang!」

「I'll tear off her throat!」

Just when the enraged beastmen were about to attack――

「Wait!!」

A voice that was filled with pressure stopped the beastment from rushing forward.

From the terrace at the second floor of the mansion that was facing this way, a cat beastman who looked like a black panther appeared while his arms were holding the shoulders of beastwomen who looked like prostitute.

The cat beastman who was at the middle of his thirty had a body that was slender but packed tight with muscle. He stepped forward without wearing anything on his upper body as though to show off his rippling muscles. He glared at me with silver eyes.

「Young head! This woman-」

「Shut up! Hmph, so you're that woman? Looks like you've gotten the *message* properly seeing that you're here.」

The black panther man looked at the dead man's face and grinned. There was distance between us so I wasn't certain but, I guessed that his combat strength was around 1200……an upper rank 4.

Seeing that he got called young head, he was one of the bosses of Munza Gang who was leading the underlings, Batil.

「Ou ou, two of my men died just to lure out you alone. You cost me a lot there. What about the other two who were with him?」

「Dead.」

Batil lightly raised an eyebrow hearing my casual answer.

「Theen, I gotta ask compensation for that from that Kirly's bunch. Looks like you got a bit of skill in you huh, but ain't you worried about that little girl at all?」

「I'm here just to make settlement for this man's attack.」

「So you don't care about the little girl?」

「The result won't change anyway. Her fate is set in stone if I lose, and it'll be taken care of if I win.」

「Hah, you got that right.」

The space between Batil and me was filled with tense killing intent. It even felt like that the temperature decreased a little.

After a glaring match for a while, Batil bared his fangs in a grin and called out to his underlings.

「You bastards, rip off that woman's limbs and bring her to me. No money if she's killed. Women, bring me chair and alcohol. This spot is my exclusive seat. The viewing seat to watch crazy stupid idiot like you dying that is.」

The prostitutes separated from Batil to go bring alcohol and chair. He turned his back on me to go to his special seating.

「Go」

「「「OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO──!!」」」

In that moment, the beastmen who surrounded me surged at me with a roar.

It was as though they had forgotten the order to not kill me. I leaned backward to dodge a serious slash from a beastman while slashing the ankles of three people who approached me with slashing type pendulum that I rotated. I also planted my black dagger into the eye of a nearby wolf beastman.

First one.

「You bitch──」

I pulled out the dagger roughly to tear up the man's face and the blood spray from that blocked the other man's sight. My knife tore his throat and then without pause I rotated while throwing the general purpose pendulum from the shadow of my fluttering cloak. It pierced the throat of a dog beastman who stopped moving after his ankle was slashed.

Third.

「Daaaaaa!」

One person aimed at my neck with a long sword. One more person thrust his spear at my foot.

The spear arrived first due to the difference in distance. I stepped on its tip and then ran on the shaft to dodge the sword. The scythe type pendulum that I threw at the same time tore the swordsman's neck.

I continued kicking the head of another person who came at me with his claws and stepped on his head to jump over him. Then I swung down the weight type pendulum that I held with short string to a cat beastman in the distance, breaking his skull.

Sixth.

「Hiyaaa!」

The gate guard swung down his axe with a yell that sounded like a scream. I smoothly dodged it and leaped toward his bosom while denting his face with my elbow. I scooped the axe that still had its swinging momentum with my ankle and sent it flying to Batil who had his back turned toward me.

The axe approached Batil with a whistling sound. The moment its blade assaulted Batil, he grabbed the chair that a prostitute was carrying and intercepted the axe.

「……tsk」

Batil had turned his back for several seconds. More than half of men were killed in that long. Batil's face twisted in irritation for the first time seeing me standing in the middle of their corpses.

「Not bad, woman……. It's impossible to catch you alive if you can do this much.」

「Can you do it?」

「Who said that I need to do it personally?」

Baan-!

Batil suddenly clapped his hands.

Numerous killing intents thickened as though waiting for that sound. The slum residents stood up from all the small buildings on the street, from the alleys, and from the shadows at the corners.

An old man who looked like a beggar stood up holding a blade. A middle aged chubby auntie was holding a kitchen knife. A boy who wasn't even of age yet was grinning with glinting eyes and a rusty hatchet in his hand.

A lot of beastmen all holding weapons in their hands. A wave of people, old and young, male and female surrounding me from every direction.

I counted their number was more than 200 just from a brief glance──.

「Do you think the people here are just resident or gang member's family? Munza Gang is a "pack" of beastman. Doesn't matter even if it's woman or brat, anyone in the pack are all "Munza Gang".」

……I see. So it's just like animals.

Even if they were just rank 1, even if they didn't have combat skill, they would overwhelm everything with the violence of number.

The wave of people was slowly getting closer with weapons in hands. I quietly raised my blade while Batil sat down on the new chair that a prostitute brought to him. Then he drank alcohol straight from the bottle.

「Don't think you can run away, woman. Don't die easily before I finish drinking. Now, dance. The main show starts now-!」

The wave of people stepped forward with Batil's voice as signal.

But at that moment, a *flute's sound* resounded from far away.

The beastmen including Batil had good hearing. They slightly looked up to the sky.

My lips formed a small fearless smile when I heard that sound.

I asked Ron to observe Kirly Company's movement, while I told Kamil to rescue Chako.

I entered this place from the front to buy time for that, but that wasn't the only reason.

If Munza Gang consisted of only several hundreds, it would be finished if I assassinated them one by one starting from the top. But, mere assassination would only serve to the fan up the anger of an organization of this scale. There was a risk they would take revenge toward other children we didn't know.

I felt the need to teach the meaninglessness of fighting me to Munza Gang, just like what I did to assassin guild and thief guild.

The problem was that when they noticed how big of a threat I was, it was possible they would target Chako even though I had sent Kamil to save her, but now there was no more "shackle" binding me.

Thinking with common sense, it shouldn't be possible for an individual to win against this number.

But, I could only find the true "strength" that I sought by overcoming that.

I threw away my cloak that had gotten heavy from the blood sprays. The approaching footsteps of the wave of people got slightly disarrayed seeing my pink blond hair that glittered from the sunlight.

The main show started from here? That was my line.

.

「I'll obtain true strength.」

.

What was “strength”?

Were you strong if your physical strength parameter high? Were you strong if your magic power parameter high? Were you strong if your combat skill’s level high?

None of those was wrong. Pure “strength” overwhelmed everything.

For example monster was also like that. If your rank was the same then the difference in physical ability would get directly translated into difference in “strength”. The foremost example of that would be [dragon] that existed in this Thurs Continent. They were the strongest since the moment they were born.

I was weak. I had no strength, no magic power, and no fighting technique when I was just a child. In order to fight against the strong, I could only become strong “mentally”.

That was why I “resolved to kill”.

Resolve to kill meant to have the resolve to get killed. You would get robbed if you didn’t rob them first. A weakling like me wasn’t allowed to have “softheartedness” to spare those who were hostile against me.

I chose to oppose and fight destiny. To live was to fight. That was why the weak me chose to become strong mentally.

But, I knew that even that strength had limit.

One day an opponent that I couldn’t win against with just the strength of heart would appear. As I am right now, I felt that I wouldn’t be able to win against Carla who purely sought only strength that she even dropped her heart into madness and risked her life solely for that, turning herself into an incarnation of “violence”.

[Iron Rose] the technique that I got a spirit to turn it into Battle Skill gave me a deciding factor that I was lacking. But, that power was nothing more

than a “weapon”. Something like weapon that could only be used for limited time was the same like a bow with only several arrows.

What was the “strength” that I sought?

The answer to that had been inside me from the start.

I who had knowledge understood that it was possible to obtain strength to some degree if you focused to pursue strength in just one field from the start. But I didn’t choose that path. I sought the ideal strength with simple straightforwardness.

Master too sought that in the past but she failed. But master drilled her combat skill that could display that strength into me who reached the same conclusion like her.

In order to become the true “War Demon”──the only one in this world.

***

The voices stopped.

Underestimating voice because the enemy was alone.

Excited voice because the enemy wouldn’t be their match even if she was somewhat skilled.

Mocking voice toward the foolishness of an individual going against this beastman pack that was many.

Fired up voice that boasted they would tear off her flesh and bathed in her blood.

Those voices stopped when the “girl” threw away her blood soaked cloak and showed her appearance. The beastman pack of 200 people stopped moving just for an instant.

Pinkish blonde hair that glittered radiantly under the sun.

Moist white skin that was unburned even by the sun that was the god of this land.

Jade colored eyes that were completely unwavering even when facing this many enemy.

She was a beautiful girl……. The men and women here had seen good looking people before. But, despite the childishness that was still remaining in her look, there was no fear, nervousness, anger, or hatred that could be felt from her despite standing in the middle of this whirlpool of killing intent. She was standing so casually that to them she looked like a rose blooming in the desert……they were unconsciously entranced by that beauty──and felt “fear”.

A boy walked out from among the pack that was slowing down slightly, as though he was lured by a whiff of rose scent.

That beastman who looked like a grey wolf had nothing else in his eyes other than the girl.

His heart was instantly stolen the moment he caught sight of her.

The sweet and refreshing smell of blood that melted the brain…….

The boy who still hadn’t become of age had executed enemies several times while staying with this pack. From that experience he imagined the girl’s soft flesh and rushed forward ahead of anyone else with his rusty hatchet in hand.

Buon!

The rusty blade that was swung down with beastman’s physical strength was diverted by the girl’s hand that softly touched its flat side.

The rusty hatchet swung through empty air and the boy lost his balance without even knowing the weight of the blade that took life away. The girl’s hand touched his arm and his elbow snapped to the opposite direction.

「──────!」

His scream was also erased by the blow that crushed his windpipe. His arm that reached out toward his comrades asking for help was also snapped. The girl's white arm wrapped around the boy's neck and twisted the boy's head to look right behind him with a strange sound that made anyone wanted to cover their ears. The face that was twisted in terror was looking toward his comrades.

How much skill was required to do such feat?

How heartless one must be to be able to do such thing?

The girl slaughtered a person without taking a single step from her spot and without even drawing out her blade. She softly pushed the boy's body that was still standing with her fingertip so it fell. Then she quietly drew out a black blade.

「Come if you want to die, Munza Gang.」

***

「──Ugaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!!」

In respond to my provocation, several men and women who couldn't endure the "anxiety" rushed out from the pack while howling.

They were scared. Flustered. Even if they pushed those feelings down with anger, was there a point in doing that?

「──────!」

My slashing type pendulum rotated and slashed straight at the eyes of a man who ran at the forefront.

The man screamed from the burning pain and the darkness that suddenly assaulted him. The pace of his surrounding was thrown out of order. I glided beside them and used my unsheathed dagger to thrust from below at the jaw of a woman nearby who had unconsciously stopped running. The blade reached her brain from there.

Heighten your concentration. Read even the flow of air on your skin using your level 4 Search and your polished combat sense. I dodged like a bending rice stalk from the spear that was approaching from behind while grabbing the shaft and pulled. I broke the face of the cat beastman who was holding that spear with my heel that was filled with steel plate.

Without stopping I used footwork to instantly closed the distance to a dog beastman who was in his prime. I slashed his neck and swung down my weighted pendulum on the head of the fat middle aged woman behind him.

The blood of the beastmen who were killed in just several seconds turned into mud on the dry ground.

With body strengthening that was assigned to agility, I didn't wait for the beastmen and leaped into their pack. The wave of beastmen who were approaching to surround me was parted.

In the ancient art of war that I found in that woman's "knowledge", there was a tactic to kill the first person brutally to grant fear to the rest. That was what I did.

Even if the crowd was formed with rank 1 or no rank, I would get torn apart in an instant if I rushed to the middle of them. I pushed down my instinctual fear from facing death to the bottom of my heart, then I faced the animal pack with strained body control like walking on the tip of a blade.

The slashing type and weight type pendulums were rotating around me in the middle of the pack. They tore the neck and crushed the head of the beastmen who approached me carelessly. My black knife was dealing lethal wounds to them.

"Barrier of blood" ──fear dulled their spirit and my rotating pendulums produced an empty space where I was standing laone.

The pack's hunt was a tactic to "survive" in order defeat powerful enemy effectively.

Batil said that they were a single pack, but how many people here could sacrifice themselves in order to keep the whole pack alive?

Were these people who chose to live in the pack so they could survive had the resolve for that? Those few people who had such resolve were the first to rush forward and got killed by me.

But, I also couldn't spread out too much fear. Excessive fear paralyzed one's heart and it carried the risk of making them to act recklessly without care of their own life. True fear came from none other than small hope. I kept in mind of this fear limit and broke through the human wave. Then I kicked the wooden planks covering the window of a nearby hut to pieces and leaped inside.

I couldn't do this while the other side still had hostage. If I tried to use some kind of tactic, Batil would surely use the hostage to foil my action.

But now there was no more shackle binding me. If hunting in pack was their tactic to survive, I'd show them the battle of an individual hunting a pack for me to "survive".

「F-follow her!」

Someone quickly returned to his sense seeing me escaping from the middle of the pack and yelled an order.

The fear of getting killed one-sidedly was covered up by the superiority of having overwhelming number in their side. But in order to let them know that it was just an illusion, my general purpose pendulum pierced between the eyes of the man who entered from the window.

Fear spread through the pack once more. Even so some people still chased me until inside the hut. I tore apart their necks accurately inside the darkness and finished them off with certainty.

Then I immediately leaped out from another window before the hut got surrounded. I broke through the window of another hut and entered inside.

And then I cut down “the relatively capable people” who were swallowed by the momentum and chased me into the darkness.

Race-wise cat beastman was strong in darkness, while dog beastman could detect enemy from smell.

However they weren’t wild animal but human race called “demi human”. They relied on their sight to handle the majority of information.

People with high rank could sense danger and dodge, but these people whose magic power control was also low leveled couldn’t even switch to night vision instantly. I lured them away from the battlefield they chose, an open place at noon under the sun at its brightest, into indoor where there was no light. They couldn’t do anything inside the darkness and lost their life.

I repeated the same thing and when I couldn’t remember accurately anymore how many people I had killed, I sensed that the number of pursuer had decreased and destroyed the rotting ceiling with a kick and climbed to the roof.

Seeing me there, the beastmen got roused up once more and approached. But I didn’t wait for them and rushed toward the baestman pack that still numbered more than a hundred with body strengthening at full force.

Perhaps they had been lying in wait until I came out. Multiple attack sorceries were fired at me who was twirling in the air.

Beastman was considered to be fundamentally poor with elemental sorcery, but they were simply proud of their body that was suitable for close range combat. They weren’t unskilled with sorcery by any means, just like that shadow user Radha.

Even if attack sorcery couldn’t be fire rapidly or needed some time to be cast, there were times it could be deadly. I leaped to the air was to “smoke them out”.

The sorcerers didn't come out to the front until now because they feared hitting their own ally. I memorized their positions with my thought that was accelerated by body strengthening, parried only the Fire Arrows and Stone Bullets that would hit me with Shield, and then I kicked on the air to use the recoil to change posture. With a twist of my body I dodged them all.

The beastman were shaken seeing me dodging the sure-kill attack that should be unavoidable.

In that moment I scattered the powder that I had prepared using daily life magic Wind. The screams from the beastmen who got hit by that echoed far and away.

What I used wasn't "poison". It was a type of spice of this region that was similar to pepper. Anyone could obtain it as long as they had money. It was simply a stimulant and its effect could only induce sneeze and tear, but it was effective toward beastman who had more sensitive sight and hearing than other race.

I covered my mouth with the shawl around my neck, closed my eyes, and rushed to the middle of the beastman pack.

「──Shadow──」

Several magic particles with my shape ran through the midst of the beastmen.

Although it was only temporary, the beastmen had gotten their sight and smell robbed temporarily. Many of their comrades had been killed and the terror that I had adjusted went past the limit. They were scared by the presence of "enemy" that ran past their side and they finally began attacking each other.

Level 3 and 4 dark sorcery also had the spells [Fear] and [Confusion], but using Shadow allowed me to spend less mana.

The beastmen bled from getting slashed by kitchen knife and hatchet, or beaten up by cudgel or hammer and fainted.

The pack that was hunting prey as one didn't exist anymore. They were killing each other. I was in the middle of that ascertaining my enemies only using their presence, where I was cutting down them one after another, along with the sorcerers whose position I had memorized.

「──G-Gust!」

A sorcerer who I missed blew away the pepper powder. In that moment I who assigned my body strengthening toward agility leaped forward and stabbed that cat beastwoman with my dagger to death. Around me were wounded beastmen with my appearance reflected in their fearful eyes.

But, there was someone who was displeased by that situation.

.

「──Tous Brothers!!」

It was then, batil who was on the mansion's terrace stood up and raised his voice.

Hearing that voice, the wounded beastmen showed hope and──fear and terror on their faces at the same time.

Killing intent could be seen radiating from inside the mansion.

『GAAA

Batil was looking at me with hatred while gritting his teeth. Even so he put on a twisted smile to show his superiority. The beastmen called Tous Brothers responded to his voice by screaming in delight from the smell of blood.

「……」

I see……so this was the cause of Batil's composure.

They looked like bear but, that was because of their bloated muscles but originally they must be cat beastman. And then most likely……their mind was taken away by drug.

They were strengthened with drug just like Goudo in the assassin guild. Their crumbling mind was restrained using even more drug.

The combat strength of the four was around 1000……I guessed that only the level of their Martial Art and Fist Fight got forcefully increased to grant them combat strength that was equal to rank 4.

「Kill her!!」

『GAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!』

With Batil's order, Tous Brothers attacked me with no weapon using only their claws and fangs.

Seeing that I *suu-……* gazed at them coldly and quietly pointed my fingertip to them.

.

The "strength" that master and I sought was something simple.

Raise all the aspect of our strength equally. That was all but, in this world where life was cheap, it was common sense to focus on just one aspect of strength in order to obtain strength quicker than anyone.

Focus on sorcery. Focus on close quarter weapon. Focus on projectile weapon. Focus on stealth……any of them would become fearsome weapon if mastered. That was why people wouldn't spare any effort to make the situation advantageous for them where under that situation they would be able to display matchless strength.

Right now even adventurer guild and assassin guild believed that the best way was to focus in mastering one type of strength and called those who tried to train in several things simultaneously as half-baked person in scorn.

Certainly even if someone learned several low level skills, it didn't mean that they had become strong, only that their weapons had increased. With that they would have to risk their life if they wanted to defeat a powerful enemy.

But it was different in the battlefield. Master was forced to fight against many in every kind of situation. There she sought true strength that was reliable.

Power to destroy the enemy. Evasion ability to handle enemy attack. Sorcery to raise your base strength with healing and offense.

If you trained in sorcery you would get more mana which would increase your ability to fight longer. Trained detection ability and stealth technique would increase your chance to survive.

Master whose heart was pressured by four elements magic stone was unable to master close quarter combat.

But, I was different. I equally trained all the skills that I selected from the start. The technique that I trained improved my other technique.

In order to handle all the strengths, master and I thought that the most important skill among those techniques was [magic power control]. All techniques were controlled by magic power. It improved the power of Battle Skill and also affected the precision of body strengthening. And its importance for sorcery went without saying. Even stealth and detection type skills were greatly influenced by it.

Magic power control was my only skill that reached level 5 was because I focused in training that. I could focus my body strengthening to either my muscle strength or agility was also thanks to that. It was no wonder that my martial art and non-elemental magic were reaching until the limit of level 4.

I was fortunate.

After all I was given the chance to obtain that strength.

I would obtain true strength here――――

.

「――Pain――」

.

『――――!?』

Reaching level 5 in magic power control enabled me to use magic to multiple enemies simultaneously.

The four Tous Brothers stopped moving all at once. In that short time that was just a blink of eye……my eyes that saw magic particle analyzed their body strengthening and confirmed that it lowered their defense.

.

「――Iron Rose――」

.

Emptiness and reality――darkness and light――two sorceries that were antithesis to each other.

The strength that master sought, that could enable you to increase everything equally――.

The current me was still not in the stage that could handle that. But, if it was now when I was using Iron Rose, the Battle Skill that multiplied my physical ability……I could show it just for an instant.

The light particles that Iron Rose covered me with also covered up the four pendulums I threw.

At the next moment, Tous Brothers whose defense was lowered were hit from *outside their awareness*. The strengthened general purpose pendulum pierced the brain of one, the slashing type tore the throat of another one, the scythe type gouged the brain of another one, and the weight type smashed the skull of the last one.

My multiplied thinking speed caught the blood spraying to the air. Tous Brothers who were instantly killed without noticing anything crumbled on the dry ground.

The area fell silent as though time had stopped in the battlefield. Then there was small sound. The beastmen realized that it was the sound of their own feet backing away on their own. With expression of despair that was twitching from terror, they dropped the weapons in their hands and the remaining more than 100 beastmen started running away while pushing away their comrades who were in their way.

「──Hiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiih!?」

「Tous Brothers are-!?」

「I wasn’t told we’re going to fight this kinda monster!!」

「Move-! Don’t get in my way!!」

The members of the pack that had lost its meaning ran around like headless chickens while trying to get ahead of the others.

I deactivated Iron Rose and sighed from the mental and physical fatigue that assaulted me while brushing away the sweat trickling down my pinkish

blonde hair that was returning to its normal color. I pointed the black knife in my hand toward the remaining enemy.

「Do you still have anymore stooges, Batil?」

Batil was trembling all over his body to endure his anger. Hearing my provocative words made him grabbed his two hand axes and he leaned forward over the terrace's railing.

「……You little girl, I'll feast on your guts!!」

***

(What is, this little girl……?)

Batil thought. Just what was this human woman who was pointing her blade at him.

This all started when a head clerk of Kirly Company brought a request to him.

Although the four factions ruling over this town were holding each other in check, that didn't mean they were in hostile situation. Some amount of compromise was required as long as they were living in this town. Each of them had their own fields that they specialized in that the other faction wouldn't interfere with.

They did that because they couldn't show any opening to groups like Carlfan Empire or evil race country Dice that were aiming for this town so they could use it as military base.

This town belonged to them who lived in the desert. They had no intention of handing even a fragment of it to outsider.

In the middle of that complicated power balance, the head clerk that was handling Kirly Company's medicine department requested him to capture a young alchemist woman and her bodyguard.

Even Kirly Company had their own people that were hired to be their exclusive thugs, but if that head clerk moved them, other people would also learn the information and it was possible that he would lose his profit. Also regarding that, the bodyguard's strength was clearly abnormal even through the eyes of an amateur like the head clerk.

Chance to meet with genuine monster like rank 5 wasn't that easy to come by, but if it was powerful rank 4 warrior than even this town that had the population around tens of thousands of people had ten or so of them. Even if the opponent was actually rank 5, just one person wouldn't be a match against Munza Gang that was a pack.

Even so facing such person would bring great harm, so in consideration of that he asked big compensation of dozens of large gold coins, but Kirly Company's head clerk agreed with that price.

Most likely those women had even more worth than that.

Until now kidnapping skilled travelling alchemist and making them addicted to drug was a habitual practice of Kirly Company ever since long before this.

And if it was a young woman, furthermore a good looking Melsenian woman that was rare in this area, the price of dozens of large gold coins was cheap. They would still get a lot of return for the investment even if the woman became overused and invalid in the end.

The head clerk didn't tell him any information about that goose that laid golden eggs and pushed off only the danger toward him. Batil felt displeased by that. Then what should he do? In that case……he just needed to take the woman for himself.

If those women had even more worth than he expected, he would take one of them as hostage so they would create medicine, and if they were also good looking than if he sold them to the old foggies at Kirly Company, Batil thought there would be no problem even if his relationship with the medicine department's head clerk would worsen temporarily.

Besides the impression that he got from the medicine department's head clerk was that it seemed he also harbored resentment from getting humiliated. So as long as he didn't let the women get away, the head clerk wouldn't become that resentful toward him.

Munza Gang offered the underworld's might, while Kirly Company offered food and daily necessity. There was no way an all-out war between the two organizations would break out just from a quarrel between mere young head and head clerk.

He captured one of the children that was said to be *healed with medicine* by that woman, then he sent his men to bring the woman to him while keeping the child hostage, but the woman who seemed to be the bodyguard killed his underlings who went to them, and brought one of them with his limbs broken while coming to his place in the open.

It was stupid to go against Munza Gang in this town──he thought that the woman had guts.

Even so in the end she was just a softhearted woman who couldn't abandon a hostage. He thought so but, when he ordered his rank 2 and 3 underlings to beat her up and drag her to him, his underlings got killed instead in less than several seconds.

*She's dangerous……*he immediately realized that. Munza Gang also had mad dog with screw loose among them but, he understood that this woman was even more dangerous than that.

She leaped in the middle of a pack of 200 beastmen without hesitation, then she killed them coldly, cruelly, without the slightest hesitation. Such scene had a certain beauty to it.

He even unconsciously felt moved that a human woman who could still be called a child could become this strong.

Batil thought.

Could he do the same thing?

The strength of the woman with pink colored blond hair was at the upper rank 4. Her overall combat strength must be above Batil who was also a rank 4.

But, that difference was nothing more than the difference in mana capacity. The more mana someone had, the longer they could fight and the more Battle Skill they could execute. Even so, Batil should be superior in stamina, muscle strength, and defense. Batil would have the advantage if they fought head on.

Batil couldn't fight against 200 people. Even so it would be different in an individual duel.

Her power that defeated Tous Brothers was a mystery, even so there was no way he could let a dangerous woman like this left alive.

Batil's reputation would fall rock bottom if he let her left after killing more than a hundred people. And more than that, Batil could allow a woman who had taken what was his to live.

He was raised in this town's trash heap that was like a slum. When he was small he gathered homeless beastman orphans who were just like him and lived until now by taking away from others.

Many of his comrades died and many more comrades joined him. He kept climbing up with only his strength until he became one of Munza Gang's young head.

And now his "pack" was killed. By a single girl.

He wouldn't anybody take away what was his anymore. Position, pack, everything belonged to him.

Standing in front of an enemy who was trying to do just that, anger like fire that was tossed on the muddy black oil that welled up in the desert was burning his heart without end.

「……You little girl, I'll feast on your guts!!」

***

The beastman with swarthy skin that gave me the impression of a black leopard──one of Munza Gang's young head, Batil kicked on the terrace's railing to jump down.

.

▼ Batil　Race : Cat Beastman ♂ – Rank 4

【Magic Power : 187/200】【Stamina : 452/470】

【Overall Combat Strength : 1203 (With Body Strengthening : 1446)】

.

His naked dark skinned upper body was exposed to the sun. He was slowly approaching with two black hand axes that seemed to be made from magic steel.

「I'll kill you, woman.」

「Try it.」

Gakiiinn!

In that moment, we stepped forward at the same time and my black dagger and Batil's black hand axe clashed. It created a piercing sound.

I was pushed back due to the difference in muscle strength. I parried the axe using my wrist and muscle strength while quickly swinging my black knife. Its blade was blocked by the other axe while he swiftly unleashed a kick. I kicked back with the back of my foot to meet the kick and used the recoil to open the distance between us.

「Uraaaah!」

Batil instantly rushed forward and his axe approached. I matched that with jumping back while rotating and pulling out a knife from my thigh that I

threw at him. The instant Batil dodged it, a pendulum that attacked from his side grazed his shoulder. For the moment Batil also took a distance from me.

As I thought Batil was above me status wise.

Our technique was equal. My speed was slightly above, but Batil was above me in everything else. I was superior in overall combat strength, but I was in disadvantage at short head on battle.

In addition my fatigue from fighting 200 people was horrible. A battlefield where I would die instantly if I got hit just from a single lucky shot was like walking across a string with my eyes blindfolded. It put a heavier burden mentally and physically on me than I imagined. Sweat was flowing like river from my body even if I stayed still.

But──that was fine.

「Tsu!?」

I dragged my exhausted body and used footwork that had all its waste removed to the extreme degree. Batil's eyes widened seeing me closing the distance instantly.

My black knife attacked as though it was scooping up from below. Batil instantly reacted with a strike of his black axe that took advantage of his weight and gravity.

KAN!

The sound was light in contrast to the attack's strength. The moment Batil showed his surprise, I used the recoil fully to attack with my dagger.

「Tsk!」

But, Batil didn't back away even then and swung his other axe.

「──tsu」

I too could only block that with my knife, but I couldn't block it fully and the axe grazed my arm.

But my dagger also gouged Batil's shoulder. He paid it no mind and swung his arm powerfully while it was spurting out blood. I crouched on the ground to dodge it, then I bent my whole body like a bow before launching a kick like an arrow to Batil's foot.

「Haaaaah!!」

「Uraaaaa!!」

We both let out our fighting spirit. Batil's kick and my kick hit each other's stomach and we both got blown away.

「……cough」

「……tsk」

I coughed lightly, while Batil spat out his saliva that was mixed with gastric juice.

Both of us got damaged, but we were doing body strengthening so it wasn't so serious that we couldn't continue fighting.

Both of us simultaneously took a fighting stance and this time we slowly closed the distance bit by bit while observing for opening from the opponent. The surviving beastmen in this place were watching while unable to even take a breath.

Strong……. Even though the vampires I fought were also rank 4, he was slightly different than them who were completely relying on body strengthening.

Master and my fighting style could give a good fight even in exhausted condition. We shaved off any waste until the limit, and used even the opponent's strength to deal a sure kill attack.

That was why no matter how strong the enemy was, it would be because of my lack of proficiency if I was unable to defeat them.

「──fuu」

I exhaled. I let out the heat that gathered inside my body and the anxiety that slightly welled up inside me along with my breath. Batil seemed to sense something from me who was silently readying my knife and rushed forward as though something was pushing him.

「Uruaaaaaaaa!!」

「……」

A sharp slash. The axe's blade felt like it would burn me just from touching it. I parried that blade with my knife, but it still left a slight gash on me from the difference in physical strength.

「Just die already-!」

「……」

Still not enough. What was not enough? No, that wasn't it. The answer was inside me.

Batil's axe was swung with powerful arm.

I slightly diverted that sharp axe by touching its flat side with my hand. Then I used the backlash from pushing the blade and my footwork to shift to the side just for a half step. The axe passed through beside me.

「──wha-」

Batil's voice unconsciously escaped him.

Even so he swiftly swung up his axe diagonally from below. I slightly diverted it by kicking up the axe's handle with my knee. I even used the recoil from kicking up to take a half step back and dodged.

I didn’t use my maximum strength with my exhausted physical strength. I dodged that attack using the skill I learned until today, the technique that I obtained in battlefield, and my skills that I had trained to high level.

My eyes saw the flow of magic particle. Search read the presence of enemy. The pressure that I was slightly exuding delayed the enemy’s action. Stealth skill hid my next move.

It felt like something *slotted* into place inside me.

An exchange of only skill and technique that didn’t use physical strength. Seeing me parrying his attacks simply using complicated technique and nothing else made Batil finally sweated from his forehead. He roared like an animal.

「You……what the hell are you-!?」

.

▼ Aria (Alicia)　Race : Human♀ –　Rank 4

【Magic Power : 213/330】△10UP【Stamina : 103/260】△10UP

【Strength : 10 (14)】【Endurance : 10 (14)】【Agility : 17 (24)】【Dexterity : 9】

《Short Sword Skill Level 4》《Martial Art Level 5》△1UP

《Throwing Level 4》《Archery Level 2》《Defense Level 4》《String Control Level 4》

《Light Magic Level 4》△1UP《Darkness Magic Level 4》《Non-Elemental Magic Level 4》

《Daily Life Magic× 6 》《Magic Power Control Level 5》《Pressure Level 4》

《Stealth Level 4》《Night Vision Level 2》《Search Level 4》

《Poison Resistance Level 3》《Abnormal Status Resistance Level 2》△1UP

《Simple Appraisal》

【Overall Combat Strength : 1497 (With Body Strengthening : 1853)】△69 UP

.

I wanted to become stronger.

In order to fulfill my promise…….

In order to grant Elena's wish.

Until I became able to fulfill Carla's wish……to kill her just like she wanted…….

「LITTLE GIRLLLLLLLLLLL!!」

Batil's face turned dark black from rage as he swung down his axe. I chopped the side of the axe's blade while keeping hold of my knife. Then using that as the fulcrum I twirled my whole body and circled around him──then I switched the evasive maneuver into offense.

「Guoh!?」

I struck using my elbow on Batil's side from right beside him.

Batil groaned from my sudden counterattack, even so he quickly sent out a kick.

I blocked that with my right leg and slightly lifted up my left leg to let the impact bleed out. My left leg glided smoothly on the ground while my black dagger aimed at Batil's throat.

「Guo!」

Batil bent backward to dodge the dagger. Seeing that his attention was directed to the knife and dagger in my hands, I stopped my gliding feet and took a short step into his range, then my right knee struck Batil's side as though to gouge its flesh.

Batil's face that was looking upward from behind back his body convulsed. He swung his axe horizontally in pain. I diverted it by pushing it up using the back of my hand, then without pause I landed a blow with my elbow on the area around his heart.

Aiming at his vital spot using weapon would just get dodged. I also didn't know whether my small blade would pierce through Batil's tough muscle until his heart. That was why I used palm strike to make the damage penetrated directly into his internal organ.

「──Ugaaaaaaaaaa!!」

Batil even ignored the attack that hit him and struck with both his axes at the same time.

I met those axes with my black dagger and black knife and parried them to left and right. Without stopping I my knee landed on Batil's nose as he charged toward me. The impact sent him flying.

Damage was accumulating inside Batil. In the several seconds of exchange after I switched into offense, Batil who had that much stamina parameter was bursting with fatigue that accumulated inside him. Now he could only sent out attack that could be parried away with my blade.

But his eyes were still alive. Even though he was lacking composure due to anger, I could see that Batil's fighting spirit wasn't weakening. So I readied my blade in order to whittle him down even more.

But it was then──

.

「Both sides, stop right there!!」

The voice of an old man resounded through the desert. More than ten beastmen had appeared at the edge of the battlefield without me noticing.

Most of them were rank 3 or below, but the small statured old man at the middle had two beastmen at his sides who felt like rank 4.

The eyes and mouth of the wolf-like old man were covered with pure white fur. He was glaring piercingly at me before he moved his gaze toward Batil who was breathing hard while still scowling.

「Elder……-」

「Batil……you were acting without order. It would be a different story if you moved because of a request, but it's troublesome that you tried to kill without order. Don't touch that girl over there.」

「What the hell are you saying, elder!!」

「That Jilgan had gotten his eyes on that girl first. That's not the only reason but, you must have noticed too. She's a troublesome fellow to make trouble with.」

「……」

I was observing them without letting my guard down.

The elder of the beastmen? Jilgan was that rank 4 old dwarf in the adventurer guild. This elder……what does he know?

「I don't give a damn about that! My pack is slaughtered! How can I just let her go after that-!」

「……Will you keep insisting that, even if that'll make you end up leaving the "pack" of Munza gang?」

「──tsu, of course!」

He abandoned even his position for the sake of his honor and pride.

A pack must be something important for a beastman. The color of Batil's face changed for an instant when he was told that he would get banished from the huge pack if he kept going like this, but his pride won and his expression when he looked toward me looked somewhat refreshed.

「……Use that "power" just now, little girl.」

「……」

Batil readied his axes once more and spat out those words.

By that power I guess he meant Iron Rose…….

「That power that killed the Tous Brothers. Holding back while facing this great me, are you screwing around? I'm the "head" of these guys. Ain't no way I'm losing against some random woman like you! Fight me with damn everything you got!!」

「……You're just saying whatever you like.」

I turned my gaze just for a moment toward the old man while keeping my blade at the ready. The elder just grinned while tacitly consenting with Batil's action.

How did the adventure guild which was Hogros Company involved with this? And these guys too, despite saying that it would be troublesome to get involved with me, they cut off Batil in order to observe my strength. Unpleasant.

But Batil. I'll respond to your pride.

「Got it. I'll kill you with everything I have. Batil. Stake your life too in the next attack.」

「Hah, ……you cheeky little girl.」

Even though he snorted and said such thing, Batil took a stance that showed he had thrown any idea of defense to the wind.

I also responded to that and put away the knife in my left hand. I pulled my hand that was holding dagger as far behind as I could.

「……You ain't using it?」

「That's my *weapon.* I'm the one deciding where and when to use my own weapon.」

「Hah, you ain't wrong. Then──」

Batil too similarly twisted his body while pulling back his right arm. Then he leaped forward using his whole body as a spring.

「It's gonna be my win if I kill you before you use it!!」

He brandished his axe high above his head and struck down in a flash.

「──[Mad Rage Raging]──!」

The one-handed axe's Battle Skill, Raging. It was a powerful Battle Skill that had the strength to kill instantly if it hit directly, just like the short sword's Critical Edge.

I threw my pendulum from my left hand just a moment before the Battle Skill was executed, then I similarly fired my Battle Skill with my raised dagger toward the approaching Batil.

「──Cyclone──」

「──!?」

Batil's eyes widened seeing the Battle Skill that I unleashed.

Cyclone was a sorcery type wide area Battle Skill with insufficient attack power. Even a one hit kill Battle Skill would only neutralize another one hit kill Battle Skill. The wide area skill Cyclone would only divert Raging slightly, but it wouldn't reduce its attack strength at all.

But, that was enough.

We both executed Battle Skill and the effect stunned our body for a moment. But the weight type pendulum that I tossed shifted my unmoving body just a little with its weight.

「Guoh!」

Fresh blood splattered from my right shoulder. Batil who couldn't even dodge the wide area Battle Skill was hit at his upper body. His sight was blocked by his own blood spray and he let out a moan.

「──Iron Rose──」

My pinkly tinged blonde hair changed into the color of gray iron. I kicked on the ground with my left leg that was freed from its stunned state an instant earlier and jumped over Batil's head while putting my pendulum's string around his neck. Batil's neck snapped instantly when the string tightened from my momentum and weight as I landed back to back with him.

Gukin……!

「……tsk」

「……」

At the end……when the string loosened, it felt like I heard Batil's tongue clicking when air escaped from his mouth.

I untangled the string from Batil's broken neck as his body crumbled down. The beastmen who was watching let out groans that sounded like scream seeing me standing alone there.

.

「……Do you want to continue?」

I turned a gaze that was pressuring the surrounding toward the elder while also pointing my blade toward him. All his bodyguards readied their weapons in respond.

「Stop! Don't be tricked by outer appearance you fools. You all who can only measure someone with vague indicator like combat strength are not her match.」

「……」

I slowly narrowed my eyes in a glare. The elder smiled at me like a good natured old man.

What did this old man know? Why was he this on guard against me even though this was our first time meeting?

「I'm an old acquaintance of Jilgan you see. There's no way someone who made him wary in just a glance is a normal person. I was right to come here following my whim. I still don't feel like stirring up trouble with Hogros Company.」

The elder smiled broadly against my wordless pressure.

「I'm the west elder of Munza Gang, Kushmu. I have a deal for you, girl.」

「……Deal?」

「Indeed. It'll be troublesome to stir up trouble with a mad dog like you, but killing an adventurer who caught Jilgan's eyes will also simply sow the seeds of later calamity. Sell your medicine to Hogros Company. I'll talk to Kirly Company. How about we reconcile with that?」

「Elder!?」

One of the four factions ruling over this town, Munza Gang. One of that Munza Gang's elders was making a suggestion that made them looked like they were backing down. The beastmen guarding him reflexively raised their voices, but Kushmu glared fiercely at those young beastmen.

「You guys still don't get it. Strength isn't just power or technique. What's left in the end is "will". It's pointless for all of you to try anything with this girl as long as you don't understand that. ……And? What do you think?」

「……I accept.」

The “deal” to make up for attacking me and trying something with someone who caught the eye of Hogros Company’s Jilgan, we obtained a place to sell our potion to, and Hogros Company obtained high class potion.

「Ou, we have a deal with this then. Let’s meet again, girl.」

Kushmu said that and turned around to leave with his bodyguards but, on the way he slightly turned toward me.

「Right right, do you know this, girl. A merchant who came from Carlfan Empire told me. Apparently there is this little girl in a faraway foreign country who made enemy of the thief guild and assassin guild and went around slaughtering everyone. That little girl is apparently called “Ash Crowned Princess” because of the ash she sprinkled on her hair. ──Just like you before this.」

「……」

So that “nickname” that suppressed the underworld had spread until this far. It wasn’t just Kushmu who was wary toward me. Jilgan, the old dwarf of Hogros Company might have also noticed.

Kushmu cut off Batil. Then he not only saw through my true identity, he avoided a hostile relationship with me while at the same time using me as a piece toward Hogros Company.

I didn’t know whether he also knew about Elena but, while seeing off the backs of Kushmu and his men, I increased my wariness toward Munza Gang……no, the four organizations that were in control of this town.

.

But──two days later, I heard a rumor that Riezan Family attacked Munza Gang and Kushmu died during it.

The Struggling People

Royal Sorcery Academy that should be a safe place got attacked by evil race and became closed temporarily. The eyes of the adult were moved away from the academy in order to search the whereabouts of the princess. There the crown prince Ervan, the first queen candidate Clara, the second queen candidate Carla……and a viscount daughter who wasn't even a high ranked noble were causing a chaotic conflict to happen behind the scene.

It resulted in something that surpassed even the purpose of the evil race that risked their life in their plan to kidnap the princess to decrease the national strength of the kingdom in the next generation. A thin dark cloud was starting to spread over the kingdom.

There were two boys walking inside the academy during that situation.

Boys──it was a bit misleading to call them like that. Fifteen years old was considered as adult in this country. These two who turned fifteen years old this year were legally adult, but student typically was still treated as boy.

But too much mana caused them to physically grow quickly and now they had the appearance of 17 years old youth. This was the reason why in the tale that was called [otome game], the "heroine" was the only one who had [conspicuously childish appearance] that caught the crown prince's attention.

Even inside that otome game, these two would give admonition to Ervan and the heroine (main character) about their relationship, but at the end they would stand back and overlook it. However that was simply because they had seen the growth and the disposition of the heroine, Alicia and recognized her.

But that wasn't the case at present.

That girl──Alicia Mercis who called herself “Licia” was an incomprehensible girl who always tried to casually step into other person’s heart. The two boys harbored strong wariness toward her.

The two had tried to admonish Ervan in this real world just like in the game’s tale. However, Licia had already cajoled the deep part of Ervan’s heart──by wholly accepting his feeling of inferiority as a “woman”. He rejected the good advice of his two friends who were also the candidates to be his aides in the future. It ended with the two boys becoming distant from Ervan who became even more dependent to Licia.

Originally the two wouldn’t abandon Ervan even then. Through that it would also be possible that they too would end up getting corrupted by Licia who acted and spoke like she knew everything.

But, at the same time due to their encounter with a girl called “Aria”, the two became able to have more realistic thinking than their story self.

For good and bad, the girl called Aria was a fierce person. Her existence could either become medicine or poison. If the boys hadn’t encountered her before enrolling into the academy……if the crown prince didn’t draw a line with them as a friend, they might end up like the royal brother Amor and Nathanital, unable to bear with Aria and reject her as a poison.

But, the two who were able to accept the girl’s way of living weren’t [dreaming boy] who could be swept away by temporary emotion. They were able to have a wide field of vision so they could make a decision based on the situation of the whole kingdom and international state of affairs.

That was exactly why, in order to wipe out the current chaos, even if they had different personal preference, the boys──Mihail Melrose and Rockwell Dandall concluded that Princess Elena and Aria were needed.

.

「……Do you think she’ll honestly tell us?」

「I heard that Miss Carla takes a liking to Miss Aria. Perhaps she might let out something slip if it's us, her fellow students in the academy who talk to her instead of the palace's noble.」

Mihail replied to the words of Rockwell who was walking at his side with those words while frowning.

The noble house that drew in evil race into this country was still not found.

To be more accurate, the low ranked noble house and underworld organization that acted directly had been found and dealt with, but the one who gave order to those people was still not found.

They were able to form a list of suspects that consisted of dozens of nobles. Rockwell's heart became gloomy when he found that the name of his one year younger little sister, Clara was also in that list.

Since enrolling into the academy, Clara had been preaching the danger of the viscount daughter Alicia Mercis.

Her doing something like drawing in evil race in order to eliminate Licia who was constantly near royalty sounded like a gamble with bad odd, but such thing was possible for Clara who had obtained the Gift of "Future Prediction". Rockwell wanted to believe in his little sister, but at the same time he also understood that it would be pointless to investigate Clara because of that Gift.

In addition Carla Lester's name was also among the list of suspects.

She was tentatively arranged to be a crown prince's wife just like Clara. It seemed unlikely for both of them to be suspect seeing their young age, but Carla had been known among the nobles as a dangerous individual in her young age of thirteen. Currently she was sentenced into a house arrest inside the academy after destroying the holy church's chapel in the capital.

Originally she should be given a more severe punishment, but the holy church that was the damaged party in this case decided to overlook Carla, and trying to capture Carla that once burned a rank 6 monster to ash would

require a company of 1000 knight and a lot of damage in the process, so the king made such decision.

And even before that, the internal situation of the country would become even more chaotic if she got removed from being a queen candidate. The current king who caused this current state was unable to cut off the faction of Count Lester. As the result the kingdom could only pass down a light punishment like house arrest.

Behind the scene, there was the secret agreement between the king and Carla that he would close his eyes to her doing to some degree, but the number of people who knew about that was limited.

Currently Carla was obediently accepting the house arrest, but someone dangerous like Carla might still cause something whimsically. Because of that there was no noble who wanted to get involved with her by choice.

But Mihail and Rockwell thought that it was exactly because Carla was such a dangerous individual that she might be able to obtain the clue for Aria's whereabouts as a fellow dweller of the same world.

In fact Carla really had such information, but the noble who got dispatched from the palace couldn't possibly pull out that information from her, but it might be possible for them who were genuinely thinking of the two girls who went missing.

「Mihail, can you lower your head toward Miss Carla?」

「……Yeah. Even if that's impossible for my grandfather the prime minister and your father the supreme knight commander, as a single man kneeling for Miss Aria's sake won't be an expensive price to pay.」

The figure of the pink haired girl flashed at the back of Mihail's mind.

Mihail knew that Aria's impression toward him wasn't the best because of their bad encounter and how he didn't even hold a candle against her, even so his feeling as a man who wanted to support her who continued to fight solitarily had become stronger compared to before.

「Oi, Mihail. I myself want to save Miss Aria but, do you understand that rescuing her highness Elena is our highest priority?」

「I know that. But you know──」

「No, you don't understand. She is worthy of respect as a warrior, but it's Elena-sama's existence that is a necessity for returning this country back to normal. That person's wide outlook and nobility, they are worthy for me to offer my sword to……」

「"Elena-sama" you say, Rockwell, you……」

Mihail's eyes widened when he heard the words that Rockwell interrupted him with.

Rockwell was a knight who was too upright. He would only use the name of the person who he had entrusted his heart to. Mihail unconsciously let out his mutter after realizing the feeling that Rockwell was hiding. Rockwell who realized the meaning of Mihail's gaze to him gasped in surprise and covered his mouth with his hand. It hid his blushing face just for a bit.

「……You got a complain?」

「Nope.」

Mihail grinned at Rockwell's question.

There was no logic to people's feeling for others. Rockwell in the story hid his true strength and only thought of Elena who was serving as the crown prince's assistant as a cousin, but now that he was putting a distance from Ervan, the figure of the princess who was doing her duty as a royalty looked like the figure of a king who he should serve to him. It made him wished to support her as a knight.

Both boys didn't think that their feeling toward their respective target would be rewarded, but the two wordlessly bumped their fist with each other while continuing to walk side by side.

「Let's go.」

「Yeah.」

They left behind their personal feeling for the time being and put on the face of a noble who was concerned for their country.

In the story the two were friends who opened up with each other, but they drew a line somewhere between them as noble. But the two right now had grown mature from meeting with girl who attracted their heart. From learning each other's feeling, they became close friend that surpassed the connection of their houses and they walked together for the sake of their objective.

***

More than a month after leaving Claydale Kingdom, there was a beast and a silhouette that seemed to be a woman on its back, running along the border of Selrayce Kingdom that was uninhabited by human. They had just passed through a dangerous forest where rank 5 monsters were prevalent.

「Nero. Let's stop here for today.」

A woman with skin that was like glamorous obsidian who seemed to be in the prime of her youth in a glance──Serjura spoke up those words. Then the jet black mythical beast called Nero stopped running even though it looked dissatisfied.

<──move──>

「You still want to continue moving? This animal is really not gentle at all with the elderly.」

Her way of speaking sounded like a grandma, but Serjura was a dark elf and her mental age was around 30 years old just like her appearance suggested. She wouldn't be like this if she was living among dark elves or having connections with a lot of humans, but until now Serjura only got involved with very few humans and she had watched them getting old, so even her

way of speaking and mentality were also changing along with their growing old.

But change came even in her life. Decades ago, a human woman barged into Serjura's home and became her disciple. Her many remarks that could even be called as odd delusion were a source of headache for Serjura, even so she didn't hate that badly behaving disciple's presence.

That disciple said that she would become adventurer after learning some sorceries for several years and ran away. After that she also returned back several times, but six years ago she stole Serjura's book and medicine before vanishing. She never saw her again since then.

But, two years after that idiot disciple was gone, a girl called Aria who was clad in abnormal atmosphere appeared.

According to her, her life was targeted by that idiot disciple however she turned the table on her.

Serjura was exasperated by the last moment of that idiot disciple which was just like her. At the same time she also felt sad for her passing. But it wasn't Aria's fault by all means. If Aria would inherit her teaching, she would accept her as a new disciple and trained her so that she at least wouldn't die. That was what she felt.

While leaving with Aria who was like that, a new feeling started to bloom inside Serjura.

Aria had strength that was unthinkable for a child. She also had courage. But she was just a kid whose purity inside got twisted to another direction because of that idiot disciple's fault.

The gap between what she knew and what she didn't know was too wide. Aria knew the meaning of killing another person when she was just barely seven years old, and yet she didn't even know the meaning of a kid acting spoiled toward adult.

That was why even though Serjura was giving her harsh training, she also treated Aria like a child as an adult. Even Aria who was like a beaten up stray cat gradually opened up her heart, and Serjura felt like she was having a daughter, something that she had given up before somewhere in her heart.

None of them expressed it into words. But a bond as “family” was forming between them.

Then, what could a “parent” do for the sake of the “daughter”?

<──march──>

「You’re saying that you can still continue? I’m amazed you can say that in such state. Stop arguing. We’re stopping here for the night.」

In order to pass through the dangerous monster habitat, Serjura and Nero kept moving until this area practically without any rest. Especially Nero who had continued to run without stopping and also had to fight against rank 5 gryphon, goblin lord, and the like. It wasn’t unharmed from that.

Nero called Aria [moon]. For Nero who had lived in solitude until now, Aria’s existence was something close to the moonlight.

But, was it possible for mythical beast and human who were different even in their way of living to be able to establish an emotional bond with each other? Currently the two were in a cooperation with each other but, Serjura was wary toward Nero as a woman who was worried for her daughter, while Nero had never opened its heart toward any other being than Aria.

Even so it seemed that it had no intention to ignore the opinion of Serjura who was Aria’s family. Nero agreed with her calm judgment about its state of health and took a rest.

.

Both sides took care of their own meal. Serjura caught a wild bird and grilled it on fire. Nero too hunted a young doe and devoured it. Their relationship was one where they didn’t even talk with each other unless it

was necessary, but although they were inside a forest, the decent meal and rest after so long caused the two to loosen their vigilance with each other just for a bit.

「……You, why are you going this far for Aria?」

Serjura asked the question casually. Nero whose eyes were closed after finishing dinner slightly cracked open its eyes.

<──no──>

<──moon──>

「Ha? You don't know why? You're saying that you yourself don't know what you're doing?」

<──mean──>

<──wrong──>

「It's not that you don't understand, but you don't understand the meaning of my question?」

<──yes──>

<──moon──>

<──just──>

「You're saying that it's only natural it's for Aria? That right there. That's what I'm asking about what you mean.」

<──thou──>

<──fool──>

「Wait a second」

<──moon──>

<—I—>

<—same—>

「Aria is the same like you? I never raised that girl as animal!」

<—son—>

<—no—>

「Someone like you isn’t even the same race with her. Just what do you know about Aria?」

<—all—>

<—know—>

「Haa!? You know everything!? Don’t jest-」

<—fool—>

One woman and one beast stood up slowly. They glared at each other inside the forest at night with the fire illuminating them.

「Looks like we need to settle this between us huh……」

<—right—>

And then Serjura and Nero had a heated debate about how much they knew about Aria. The two who had accumulated exhaustion through their journey until now fell asleep on top of each other when dawn arrived. Their departure ended up getting delayed for one whole day.

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(What a mystery……)

She left the evil race army, then she secluded herself in the country of human that she was enemy with, then she took disciple……one of them died because of a stupid reason, but the other surly disciple looked up to a dark elf like her as though she was a parent, so now she was travelling with a mythical beast toward the evil race territory that she had been avoiding, in order to save her “daughter”.

The figure of that surly disciple that she had been watching ever since she was little overlapped with a certain “girl”.

(……Aishe)

Her only blood related family. A little sister who was far younger than her…….

After losing her parents, Serjura became a warrior of the evil race army in order to provide for her little sister. After that she rushed through numerous battlefields, sometimes she even got acquaintanced with her enemy. Serjura who was losing sight of the meaning of the fight entrusted her little sister to a married couple who she was friendly with. She then faked her death in the battlefield and left the army.

If Serjura stayed with Aishe, her little sister might copy her and joined the evil race army as warrior. In fact, Aishe who was starting to grow up from infant into girl was looking at her big sister who got called as “War Demon” of the evil race army with strong admiration.

She must have grown into adult around this time……. Serjura earnestly prayed that her little sister at least spent a life that was disconnected with

fighting.

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「New information and formal request came from Margrave Melrose. From now on we “Rainbow Sword” will head out of the country on ship in order to search for her highness the princess.」

Inside Dalton’s mansion in the capital, Miranda, Feld, and Viro, the members of rank 5 adventurer party “Rainbow Sword” were gathering.

But, the youngest member Aria went missing together with Princess Elena who she was guarding. They were planning to search for them even if there was no request from the kingdom, but the leader Dalton chose to accept the request in order to obtain accurate information and concrete support rather than going off on their own, which would limit their action.

「We’ll depart from the capital tomorrow. A ship that belonged to Margrave Melrose should arrive for us in the harbor city east from here. We’ll get on it and head to Carlfan Empire.」

The location of Elena and Aria who vanished due to teleportation still hadn’t been found even now. But, Margrave Melrose’s relative, the prime minister brought them that information as the information with relatively high chance of correctness.

The source of the information was kept secret but, that information was something like this.

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『Doesn’t matter if it’s from sorcery or dungeon’s secret treasure, if it’s space teleportation and the caster die in the middle of activation, the possibility is high that the teleported target fell midway. If that girl is along for the ride, I think they’ll be able to go home no matter where they end up but, if there’s still no contact from the until now, then perhaps they fell at the desert on the way to the evil race country? Anyway I recommend

searching from Carlfan Empire that is close to the evil race country toward the direction of the evil race country.』

.

The girl who gave that information didn't consider the possibility of "death" which was the likeliest possibility. She talked as though to declare that they were alive.

In actuality the girl who was giving that information had full grasp about the secret treasure and even the destination of the teleport. She didn't have even a shred of doubt that Aria would definitely return if that was all she was facing.

That girl whose mental state was far removed from ordinary person gave the information she had because of a personal reason. She simply wanted to hasten the time of her reunion with Aria.

It was an uncertain information but, in regard to the dungeon's secret treasure "Gem", the analysis of the sorcerer guild and the royal sorcerers were in accord. The royal family couldn't send a search party to foreign country solely based on that information, but an adventurer party that was outsider but also a related party to this case could be used. In the end the king used his personal fund to make this request to them.

Each member started moving along with Dalton's order. Among them Feld went to the room that was assigned to him in this mansion to take a great sword made of magic steel. He tightened his grasp on it.

「Aria……」

For Feld, Aria was a reliable comrade, a cute junior, and also a charming member of opposite gender until he noticed her actual age, but right now she was someone who was like a little sister to him.

Viro had told Feld about a certain matter.

It seemed he was staying quiet until the dense Feld noticed it himself, but apparently Aria was using a steel knife that belonged to Feld.

It triggered his memory. Some years ago, while Feld was on his way to take the great sword of magic steel that he ordered from Galbas, he encountered a homeless orphan in a forest alongside the highway.

He mistook the child as a monster, then he taught the child the way to survive though it was only for a short time. After that Feld gave the knife that he used to dismantle monster to the child in exchange of the knife he broke.

That knife was also Galbas's creation. Galbas who realized that thought that this too was fate at work and it became the impetus of him giving the knife of magic steel that he created to the child.

For Feld it was a memory that he had almost forgotten, but apparently Aria was still using that knife even now.

Thinking back now, perhaps Aria's relaxed casualness with him until now was because she thought of him as someone who could be trusted──someone like a family from the start.

That small homeless orphan who he thought as a boy had grown into an eye-popping beautiful girl, so Viro told him that it couldn't be helped that he didn't notice, but Feld felt pathetic that he couldn't do anything for that girl who was like family to him when she was in danger.

「I'll find you for sure……Aria.」

.

While Feld was renewing his spirit, Aria's other master who was also his acquaintance was──.

「……what to do」

Viro was at a loss. Of course he had no objection to go to save his beloved disciple Aria as her respected master. Not only that, he was the one who

knew her the longest in the party. It was him who took the initiative to run around everywhere gathering information.

Viro was walking with heavy footsteps toward the new house he bought in the capital.

It was a small place compared to Dalton's mansion, even so it was the type of building that was generally called as [manor]. It had the size that was sufficient for a low ranked noble to live there with his family and several hired servants.

「I'm homee……」

Viro had been living with a woman since several months ago. She was a receptionist of the adventurer guild who he had been acquainted with since some time ago. She suspected him as a kidnapper when he brought the still small Aria to the guild. Viro fell in love with her from that cold gaze and spent several years to win her heart.

Viro was still young in adventurer standard, and yet he chose to accept the black ops' invitation and retired because she demanded him to have stable job and salary.

Viro was weak against woman and he had financially supported lady of the night (prostitute) several times until now. He was unthinkably tight with money for a first class adventurer. Even this residence was bought by borrowing money from Dalton. Right now he was completely whipped by the woman he was living together with.

「My, you're home early today.」

「Yeah, I'm home, Mary.」

A pretty woman with long hair wearing a white apron appeared from the back.

The woman was still working as receptionist. She was home because she used her piled up paid leaves to exercise her cooking ability for the sake of

Viro who was recently busy with his work.

How would she react if he told her that from tomorrow he would be gone for several months going to foreign country? Obviously she would be in a bad mood and sent a cold glare to him.

Viro didn't hate getting looked with scorn by a charming beauty, but he didn't like making them seriously angry. His heart wasn't so vast that he could also accept getting his life targeted seriously even if it was by a beautiful girl like Aria.

But, there were times where a man had to firmly make a decision for the sake of his beloved disciple.

That time is now, Viro told himself to fire up himself.

「Mary, listen to me.」

Viro was sweating while telling Mary about everything that he had kept quiet until now and what he would do from now. Mary's cheerful gaze instantly turned freezing until below the freezing point.

「What's the meaning of this?」

「No wait Mary, as her master I──」

「That's obvious!」

She got angry just like he imagined. Viro thought that Mary was angry because she couldn't spend her holiday with him, but he was wrong with the direction of her anger.

「Eh?」

「Why did you keep quiet about Aria-san to me!? That girl is still 13 years old!」

「No, I also think the same but……」

「Geez, you're really an awkward person. I'll cool for you right away, so wait there. Eat a lot then go and bring back that girl safely.」

「Mary……」

The end result was that he got forgiven, he got fed with delicious food, which made him happy. But he felt that somewhere inside Mary, Aria got higher priority than him. He was shoveling food into his mouth while feeling like he couldn't accept it.

The Prelude of Wars

Soon it would be two months since Elena and I came to this desert town Cutlass.

Our relationship with the beastman pack, Munza Gang became a vague one of [non-interference as much as possible]. It was only as much as possible because the gang had a lot of hot-blooded members who would pick a fight with us. In case something happened, Munza Gang would deal with the corpses for us free of charge.

With the agreement with Munza Gang, the high class potion we created became sold directly to Hogros Company and now we had a source of earning, but with that we unintentionally became enemy with Kirly Company. So we lost the chance to make a connection with them that would allow us to cross the desert toward Carlfan Empire with their caravan.

Right now I was walking alone on the main street of Cutlass.

The swarthy skinned Cruz people and dwarves and beastmen whose skin was sunburnt from the sunlight were working hard under the blazing down sun.

Being vigorous and simply being busy were different. The price of food in this desert town was expensive. One had to join under an organization's umbrella if they wanted to get food with cheap price. But belonging to an organization would require them to pay protection money, so in the end people had to struggle desperately everyday in order to get their hands on expensively priced food.

This whole town was like a slum, but it was rare for pauper or street urchin to pickpocket or steal. Getting caught doing something like that in this town would mean certain death. If they were hungry and would have to risk their life anyway, it would be better to resort to robbery from the start. That was the thinking of the people here.

“Strength” was necessary to live in this town. As long as one had strength they wouldn’t even need to resort to stealing. They would be able to take away everything from the weak.

But……it wasn’t just my imagination that there was a faint sense of tension in the air as I passed through the town that was just like usual.

.

Zari……, the bottom of my leather boots made that sound from stepping on the stone floor as I arrived at my destination.

My hood was pulled down as I intentionally showed my bare face. The noise of the adventurers inside Hogros Company’s adventurer guild instantly turned louder, and then the sounds were vanishing like a receding wave.

In the middle of that tense silence, the beastmen who likely knew about my agreement with Munza Gang were showing a faint hostility……and sign of fear that surpassed that. They averted their eyes from me.

The Cruz adventurers who didn’t know about the situation in detail sensed that strange atmosphere between the beastmen and me and looked puzzled, even so they kept their quiet.

As for the dwarves who boasted the greatest force in this adventurer guild…….

「What do you want, Melsenian woman?」

A young dwarf blocked my way as I walked deeper inside. He was about as tall as me, but his weight might be three times of mine.

「I come to talk about potion. Check with your superior.」

「Never heard about that. Don't think that a pasty human woman like you can have your way here!」

A fist that was wearing gauntlet that used beetle's carapace suddenly swooshed through air toward me.

His combat strength was around 400……I guess his rank was bout middle or upper three.

Perhaps he wanted to test his skill or simply disliking me that he was taking a swing at me. It was sudden but his attack was serious. Judging from that fist, he must be able to gauge his opponent's strength to some degree.

Just based on his thick arm, his physical strength should be above me even when I used body strengthening. He had the strength. He also had the mentality of not letting his guard down even though he was facing a woman. But, that was all.

「Gah!?」

I dodged the approaching fist and counterattacked with a palm strike that hit his jaw that was covered by lightly trimmed black beard. The impact made the man bent backward.

The dwarf's tough jaw didn't break even after getting hit by my glove that had magic iron plate inserted in it. The man grinned even while blood was trickling from his mouth. He raised his fist once more. But I too didn't plan to wait for the attack from a dwarf with low agility to arrive.

I immediately put my arms around the man's arm and pulled my body to bend backward. The man's arm got pulled and I struck with all my strength on his elbow joint with my knee.

Gugyun!

「Guaaaaaaaaaaaaaaag!?」

The man who got his elbow broken to the opposite direction rolled around on the ground while holding his arm in intense pain.

The dwarves who were remaining a spectator lose their temper seeing that and stood up. But──.

.

「What's going on here」

A heavy voice that shook the dwarves echoed inside the guild.

Jilgan. The rank 4 heavy warrior dwarf.

He was also an authority in Hogros Company. He appeared with a heavy footstep that shook the ground. The expression of all the adventurers, not just the dwarves turned pale.

Jilgan kept walking and saw me. Next he looked down on the man with broken arm. The young dwarf started sweating rivers on his face, either from pain or fear.

「W-wait a sec, Jilgan-san-, I just──」

「I already said, call me if a pink haired human woman come.」

「T-this isn't-! I-」

「Idiot isn't needed even if it's my fellow dwarf.」

Gukin! Jilgan put his foot on the man's knee and then crushed it underfoot.

The man screamed, while the inside of the guild conversely fell quiet. Jilgan didn't even give a glance at the man and turned back toward me. Then he jerked his chin to point at the back.

「I already heard the story, "rose". Come with me.」

「Got it.」

It would be impossible for him to continue as adventurer like that. Jilgan's expression didn't change at the slightest even after crushing his man's life. I followed behind him as he walked deeper inside.

I kept silent as I walked forward behind him. We walked up a stone stair and entered a dimly lit corridor. We kept walking until we arrived in front of a wooden door which was unusual in this town.

.

「Guild master, it's the guest I told you.」

『──Get in.』

Jilgan opened the door after a voice behind the door gave permission and entered inside. I followed after him and found a person waiting for us there.

Jilgan walk to behind that person and folded his arms there while kept standing. A female dwarf was sitting on a leather sofa. She put on a smile that didn't reach her eyes.

「So you're the "rose". Well, sit down.」

「……」

The west elder of Munza Gang, Kushmu noticed that I was "Ash Crowned Princess".

But it seemed the surviving beastmen of Batil's pack spread the story differently. Now I was getting called as [Desert Rose] instead of [Ash Crowned Princess].

My guess was that the prestige of [Ash Crowned Princess] itself was something troublesome for the people here. It was a story from other country so I thought the people here wouldn't put that much importance to it, but a high ranked assassin that had made enemy of people that usually

were untouchable and yet survived them. The existence of such person itself would be a nuisance and troublesome.

Right now Munza Gang and Hogros Company were choosing the policy of non-interference with me because the drawback of making me their enemy was bigger, but I couldn't predict when they would become my enemy because of some kind of reason.

The female dwarf stared at me appraisingly with pressure oozing out of her body.

I ignored that and sat down right in front of her while meeting her gaze. The female dwarf exhaled *fuh* and smiled.

「I'm Jesha. Jesha Hogros. I had heard about you from old man Kushmu.」

「Aria. I heard I can do business here.」

「Yeah, that's right. But, can you really deliver high class potion for us?」

「No problem.」

I put my hand inside my bag and pretended to pull out high class potion inside my Storage from there. Jesha leaned forward and stared at it when I put it on the table.

Jesha Hogros……she might be a relative of Hogros Company's president or his daughter.

She was a female dwarf with bright red hair that was like mane and huge build.

Normal female dwarf was petite and even the adult one would look like a big boned human girl. It was said that male dwarf grew beard all over their face in order to hide their childish looks, so that must be their racial trait.

But Jesha was different from the average female dwarf who would be only as tall as a petite human woman. She was as tall as me who was slightly taller than the average human woman, but the width of her body was nearly

twice of me. She was exuding the atmosphere that made me imagined a veteran warrior covered with armor of muscles.

「Geezer. Try using it.」

「As you command.」

Jilgan replied to Jesha's order and suddenly stabbed a short sword into his own hand. Then he took the potion on the table and applied it on his wound without even checking for poison.

「……How's it?」

「The quality is good. Not like the potion of that Kirly bunch that has deteriorated from heat and long travel. No, this one will still be better even if theirs is fresh.」

Jilgan used a cloth to wipe his clotted blood and showed the back of his hand that had mostly recovered back to normal. Jesha nodded with satisfaction.

「Great. We can crush one of Kirly Company's forte with this. Oi, Aria. How many potion you bring with you? How many you can deliver per month?」

Jesha seemed to get into good mood and called me familiarly with my name. In respond I took out even more high class potions without a change in my expression and put them on the table.

「I have fifteen right now. I can make fifty per month.」

「That's few……is what I wanna say but, guess it won't be a problem if it's for our own usage rather than for selling. I'm down with that. Oi, geezer. Pay her with some extra.」

「By your will.」

Jilgan took out a leather pouch from his pocket and tossed it to me. The pouch was filled with several gold coins.

Inside was Carlfan Empire's currency in the amount that was around twenty percent greater than what Kirly Company would pay us.

The reason Adventurer Guild wanted to secure high class potion wasn't only for fighting other organization. There were high ranked monsters deep inside the ancient ruin Resvel. One of them……was low rank 6 earth dragon. At the very least they would want to secure a hundred of this potion in case such monster appeared.

「I've received it.」

I said that and moved to stand up, but Jesha called out to me with a relaxed tone.

「Oi oi, going home already? There're two beautiful girls in the same room like this. No one is gonna complain even if we drink some fire spirits while having girl's talk you know?」

「Funny joke.」

I replied like that with a straight face. Jesha looked back at Jilgan behind him with an exasperated face. But she saw him closing his eyes as though in meditation and pressed a hand on her face while looking up to the ceiling.

Fire spirits was distilled alcohol with strong alcoholic content created by dwarf. It would truly burn if it was lit with fire. I didn't want to drink such thing, but for now I sat back on the sofa. Then Jesha spoke with slightly lowered volume.

「……Aria. You have heard the news right?」

「Yeah.」

I also spoke briefly while nodding to her words.

「Kushmu died. By Riezan Family's hand.」

Munza Gang's west elder Kushmu who acted as the go-between for Munza Gang, Hogros Company, and me was attacked by Riezan Family and died.

The agreement itself was between organizations so it didn't get scrapped after reaching this point, but Jilgan who was acquainted with Kushmu was furrowing his brow in displeasure.

The strange atmosphere of the town was caused by that. It wouldn't be strange for feud to break out anytime anywhere.

Riezan Family was in control of the red-light district that was filled with various races. Why would they pick a fight with armed organization like Munza Gang? Ron and I and the others couldn't determine the reason even after gathering information. Riezan Family already captured the perpetrators and publicly executed around ten people, but there was no one who believed the front that they were trying to sell.

「We've got no business with the lizard's severed tail. Just what are those guys thinking……have you noticed?」

「What happened with the guild's dark elves?」

Jesha slightly narrowed her eyes when I said that. The guild's members were mainly dwarf, but other races should also be included. However I hadn't seen any dark elf here.

「The guild's dark evels vanished several days before Kushmu got done in. Not all of them are gone but, it's only the young dark elves who were born in this town.」

「……」

The dark elves with some level of strength……who weren't born in this town were gone to somewhere. What was the meaning of this…….

Jesha poured fire spirits into her glass and started drinking as though to say that the talk was over. I saw Jilgan nodding so I stood up and walked toward the door. Jesha spoke one last time toward my back.

──Be careful with the "evil race"──she said.

***

Evil race. It was like a derogatory term toward dark elf, so that term didn't get used in this town where there were also ordinary dark elves living in it.

What was the meaning of Jesha intentionally saying that? I could guess. But even that guess wasn't definite seeing how Jesha was being vague about it.

I returned to the street and wore my cloak once more to hide myself. Then I went to buy necessities.

Clothes, food, alchemic materials that were hard to be found around here, etc. But I didn't buy the cheap wheat mixed with sand that this town's residents often bought.

My aim was the small scale merchant caravan that came to this town. They were really wary and Elena and I who weren't used to long travel couldn't come with them to go back but, at least we could obtain proper food and material from them.

I bought a bit of wheat, salt, and sorghum that was still unprocessed in a large bag. They were expensive but they didn't get sand mixed in. I stored the bag into my Storage under my cloak before leaving the town.

.

There were several presences following me. Were they from Kirly Company or Hogros Company……. Judging from their unskillful tailing skill, I guessed they were just some thugs aiming for my money.

Anyone who knew about my strength wouldn't send a tail with ability below rank 3. In the first place the me right now could even detect rank 4 scout, so there was no point tailing me.

Even so I crossed the desert by running just in case. I took a large detour for around one hour before approaching the town again. I erased my presence and headed toward a rotting watch tower at the outskirt of the town.

The crumbling tower was made from stone and had been there ever since the town was built. Nobody would get near it. Even so I knew that this tower was still standing.

「Welcome back Aria.」

I passed through the old cloth that was hanged up to act as a door and entered inside. The dog beastman toddler noticed me from her voice and clung to my foot while shaking his tail. Elena who was playing with the dwarf toddler smiled softly when she saw me.

「I'm back "Lena".」

This place was……one of our hopes to be able to escape from this town.

The Path to Escape

Six males and females were meeting at the desert at night, some distance away from the desert town Cutlass.

At one side were three Cruz people. Three people wearing cloak to hide their appearance were facing them.

「──then just as planned.」

「How far your main force have travelled? If they take took long……」

「There's nothing to be worried about. But, it'll depend on the situation.」

「Oi, we believed in you guys──」

「We'll execute the next step. You guys too don't want to waste this rare great chance right?」

「You guys will keep your words right?」

「Yeah, we'll keep our word. But, you understand don't you?」

「W-we get it, but……」

This was a great chance that the Cruz people couldn't miss.

The plan itself had been talked since a long time ago. But, there was a risk that they would turn all the other factions in charge of the town into their enemy with this.

Even so they got on this plan in haste because they successfully removed an elder of one of those faction──Munza Gang. Their success was also partly

because a rank 4 warrior of Munza Gang who just died. Because of that Munza Gang's security had some hole in it temporarily.

But, why did they suddenly switch from carefully aiming for a chance to assassination of an enemy faction? The Crus people here were the ones who gave the order, but until that time they never even thought about directly targeting an elder of Munza Gang.

Even so they moved into action. That was because there was a cause that would make them take action even if Munza Gang's combat strength wasn't lowered temporarily.

This meeting was done outside the town every time. One of them……a young woman who participated since last time quietly pulled down her hood and exposed her bare face to the night air in front of the Cruz people who were acting timid as though they had woken up from their dream.

「──Don't worry. Things are going well──」

Black skin and long ears……she was a girl who could be said to be still childish. The moment the Cruz people heard her "voice" and the "light" from her shining crimson eyes, hesitation vanished from their faces as though they had been put under suggestion.

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After that the Cruz people and the cloaked group parted from each other. The girl who was the leader of the vampire clan also took some distance from her comrades and stared at the town at the distance. She bared her sharp fangs before starting to walk into the darkness.

***

「You're back.」

Kamil walked down the stair from the upper floor of the crumbling watchtower. He let out a faint smile of relieve seeing me back.

This watchtower was Kamil and Ron's hideout. It wasn't like they had completely become our ally, but we ended up joining hands in order to survive this situation.

There were still things that we hadn't told each other. There were also things that we couldn't say. Including Elena and my identities. I didn't think that they would harm us at this point, but it was possible that information might cause them to hold back.

If it became known that Elena was a princess of Claydale, even Jisha who was our business partner right now might move to secure Elena's person when the time came.

It was known that I was "Ash Crowned Princess", but it should still take some time before people connected that to the "missing princess". So right now we should avoid leaking information needlessly.

Similarly we also didn't question Ron and Kamil about their true identity. After all our action could also become tied down by learning that.

「I bought food. Give it to Chako.」

「Sorry……thanks.」

「Thank you very much, Aria-san.」

Kamil bowed his head. Then the cat beastgirl CHako appeared from behind him. She accepted the food that I took out with an apologetic look.

Kamil and Ron took back Chako from Munza Gang using my fight as distraction, but they had gotten into trouble with Munza Gang several times and my compromise with the gang didn't cover them too. They were sheltering Chako and the children here.

Munza Gang too didn't have time to care about them with Kushmu's death, but we judged that it would be better for the two to not walk in the town for now. If it was Kamil then I thought he would be able to hide and obtain food stealthily, but considering the distance from the town to here and the

increase in food price, it would be more efficient for me to do it using my Storage.

Besides there was something that I wanted the two of them prioritized more.

「Kamil. Have you gathered the materials?」

「Yeah. I managed to gather quite a lot. But, the adults has gotten fewer around here, so I'll need to go further for more……」

「I'll also take that into account. Do I hand the magic stones to Ron?」

「He's upstairs so show your face to him while you're at it. Also……don't work too hard. It's a big help already with just the food and Rena here.」

「I know.」

Kamil looked conflicted like he wanted to say something but he couldn't say anything. I lightly hit his shoulder and passed him by to climb the stairs.

.

The stairs were built along the tower's wall in spiraling shape. Seen from outside, the tower looked like it could crumble any time, but at the inside the out of shape stairs and the cracked walls were being reinforced with plaster or brick.

They had been fixing "a certain thing" in here for more than one year.

I heard that Ron arrived to this tower when he came to this town. And then Kamil found him.

By chance or perhaps it was fated, the two were in similar circumstance. At first they were wary with each other, even so they felt from each other parts that they could sympathize with and in the end they worked together.

Why did Ron arrive to this tower? Ahead of this stair, there was the reason why he arrived to the top of this tower.

「Ron, is the repair going well?」

「Hi, Aria. ……Around 90% of it I guess.」

The rooftop of the tower was breaking down. That thing was placed on that weather beaten place.

Hot-air balloon──the “knowledge” of that woman inside me taught me what the object was.

It wasn’t something big. It was a small thing that would be full with several adults in it, but it should be possible to bring everyone here to escape from this desert.

I had never seen something like hot-air balloon even at Claydale Kingdom. It wasn’t because the technology simply didn’t exist, but because there were few ways to fight airborne monster and so it didn’t get counted as a transportation method.

But, apparently large flying monster like gryphon or wyvern was few in this region. At best there was only rank 2 large eagle. But even such monster would be quite dangerous against hot-air balloon in my memory, so the balloon used monster leather as material to improve its toughness.

But naturally monster leather was heavy as material. Because of that apparently the balloon obtained floating power using magic tool that was fueled by fire element magic stone to create heat instead of normal burner.

The magic stones that I brought were for that.

「I brought fire element magic stone.」

「Thanks, you’re a great help. This thing use a lot of fuel after all.」

「How much more we need?」

「Hmm~……」

Ron who was working to repair the hot-air balloon considered the materials at hand and the journey ahead while lightly scratching his head.

「I think we'll need a bit more if we want to reach the safe area at Carlfan Empire. But putting it another way, just this much is fine if you only want to arrive there, but we won't have any reserve with just this.」

「Roger. I'll hunt or buy for more.」

We decided to head to Carlfan Empire on this hot-air balloon. Fortunately Ron and the others were also wishing to leave this town that had became suspicious.

Because of that they were cooperating with us. Kamil went to the ruins to gather materials to repair the balloon and ingredients for my alchemy. I went to the town to sell potion and bought fire element magic stone or food.

We asked Ron to focus on the repair using the materials we gathered. Elena was taking care of the children together with Chako. Her light sorcery and water sorcery were indispensable for our basic living.

This cooperation was beneficial for them too. While Elena and I were also thankful for this kind of hideout because we now couldn't use the inn in the town anymore after becoming an enemy of Kirly Company.

Our course was decided. But, the problem was with the repair of the hot-air balloon itself.

It took money to maintain the hot-air balloon. The balloon required the leather of armored lizard called [Desert Lizard] that was strong against heat, but only the lizard's soft stomach part was usable. And the lizard had to be of a certain size so to reduce the number of stitching and maintain the balloon's integrity.

Furthermore, even though the lizard was strong against heat, the magic stone it had was earth element. That was why in order to obtain fire element magic stone, we could only hunt a different monster or went to town to buy it.

Two sorcerers of rank 3 or above were required to go against flying monster, so only noble could operate this kind of thing.

Ron who possessed such vehicle and came this town was most likely a noble of Carlfan Empire.

But we didn't have any plan to pry into that. He had trusted us enough that he told us how something important like this belonged to him.

We too weren't so stupid to inquire into what might a noble like Ron investigated that he came to this town. Doing that might break the relationship of trust between us.

They and we were taking action for the sake of our respective objective. But…….

(……They're naïve.)

I returned from the rooftop and started preparing to leave again. Then Elena approached me with a worried face.

「Aria……you're going out again?」

「Yes. There're some more things that I can still do.」

We didn't have time at all. It had been two months since we went missing──Elena and I calculated that the country would give up on the princess's survival after three to six months passed, but the more time passed the more people planning bad thing would appear. That was why I had to deliver Elena to Carlfan Empire within three months at the very least so she could contact Claydale Empire.

「Wait──Cure──」

Elena asked me to stop and put her hand on my cheek. The gentle light erased the heat on my cheek that was burned by the desert's heat.

「Thanks.」

「No……Aria, be careful out there.」

.

I put on my cloak and hood again before walking through the desert alone.

I left the watchtower where Elena and others were staying──I faintly sensed “something” and headed toward that direction.

「──Illusion──」

The illusionary flame that I created took the appearance of Carla’s specialty, Fire Breath’s fire beam. It licked a rocky place and spread the sensation of heat there. Then two silhouettes jumped away from the shadow.

「──Wait!」

Two silhouettes wearing sand colored cloak──the bigger one spoke up with a pleading tone, but the smaller one rolled on the ground in respond to my attack. That person on the ground fired an arrow from a weapon that looked like crossbow toward me.

I ran toward them while trapping the fired arrow in my fluttering cloak. The bigger person who spoke just now seemed to make his decision and pulled out a short sword from his waist.

They might not be enemy. But, they might be enemy.

The big man readied his short sword that was covered with something gooey that might be poison. He stepped forward to cover for the other one. I dodged that poison sword while confirming that the arrow that was caught in my cloak was also covered with poison. I stabbed it into the man’s neck.

「────tsu!」

That man collapsed without screaming. The weighted pendulum that I threw using his body as cover struck the head of the guy with crossbow from the side. That person was blown away while letting out a high-pitched scream.

Woman huh──I quickly leaped forward and kicked her down before she could pull out a weapon, then I pressed my black dagger on her throat. The woman groaned.

「Y-you bastard-」

「I'm the one asking question. Who's your target?」

「Tsu!」

The woman gulped when I emitted my pressure.

All the movements made the hood of the woman's cloak fell and appearing from there was the face of a dark elf girl glaring at me. She didn't look any older or younger than me.

「Dark elf?」

The dark elf girl gasped hearing my words and grabbed her hood. But she noticed that it was too late at this point and glared obstinately at me despite my knife on her throat.

「H-how dare you……」

「That man is still alive.」

「──tsu」

The dark elf girl held her breath hearing my words.

The man who I stabbed on the neck with arrow was still alive.

The poison on the girl's arrow and on the man's blade should be the same. For him to be still alive meant that the poison itself wasn't a type that killed instantly.

I didn't plan to give any mercy to this girl if my eyes saw that man's life force vanishing.

But, for them to go out of their way to use poison that wasn't instantly fatal meant there was a higher chance that they weren't enemy.

In that case, what was their objective? "Who" was they targeting among us?

「But, that man will die first if you don't speak.」

「Kuh」

Judging from the interaction just now, this girl was still young. ……Even so if she wouldn't say anything…

「……」

「……tsu」

Blood trickled from the girl's black skin when I lightly pushed my knife on her throat.

I never took off my gaze from her to make her realize that I was serious. The tip of my knife also didn't waver. Just when I was about to give another push on her──.

「……Please……wait」

That man whose neck was stabbed with arrow was standing up. The blood soaked arrow fell on the dry ground.

「Father-!」

The dark elf girl reflexively raised her voice. The man who was pressing his hand on his bleeding neck glared at his daughter for exposing his identity. Then he turned his gaze to me.

But, that exposed face showed that he was a Cruzian, not dark elf. Was she his stepdaughter? Or was she a mixed blood with unexpectedly a lot of dark elf trait? This made it even harder to ascertain their affiliation but I could just ask them that.

「Guh」

I strongly stepped on the chest of the girl to push her on the ground to take her hostage against the man. At the same time I also took the man who was still unsteady on his feet because of the poison as hostage against the daughter.

.

▼Man in his prime　Race：Cruz♂・Rank 3

【Magic Power： １３４／１６５】【Stamina： ２１２／３５０】

【Overall Combat Strength： ２０７／５８６】▽379DOWN

【Status：Paralysis】

.

▼Girl　Race：Dark Elf♀・Rank 2

【Magic Power： １５５／１８５】【Stamina： １５２／２１０】

【Overall Combat Strength： ３０８（With Body Strengthening： ３４４）】

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There was the wall of rank but I understood that the two of them were very well-trained. Putting aside the daughter, the father who had exchanged blow with me should be able to ascertain this situation.

Although it was a weak poison, if it was this man then he should understand what would happen if he fought me in that paralyzed state.

「Please……wait. At the very least we are not targeting the life of anyone in your group.」

「Father……kuh」

The father fell on his knee again because of the poison. The girl tried to get up seeing that but I stepped on her even more.

「Then, why were you two spying on us?」

I asked that question without any inflection in my tone. The man seemed to sense something and opened his mouth.

「I cannot tell you everything. However, our role is to protect a certain person. I apologize for our suspicious behavior, but we hold no ill will toward you.」

「……」

The man and I looked at each other steadily. So he confessed that they had been watching us, but they harbored no hostility toward us as long as we didn't do anything to them from our end.

The daughter was glaring at me while grinding her teeth for injuring his father, but I looked at the man's eyes and lifted up my foot from the girl.

「Wha-……」

The girl conversely opened her eyes wide in disbelief.

「Leave.」

「……My gratitude.」

The girl ran toward her father after I said that. The man borrowed his daughter's shoulder to stand up and nodded at me.

「Girl……this land is enveloped in the fire of war. If you are planning to leave from here, I recommend that you move into action quickly.」

「……I'll keep it in mind.」

The two vanished behind the rocky place after leaving those words. I picked up the arrow that was left on the ground. Its material was something that I

didn’t see often.

It wasn’t like I believed in the man’s words or felt sympathy to him.

They were observing us. It would be better to eliminate them if Elena was my only concern. But, although it was just a short conversation, I judged that it would be better to not kill them yet.

「……」

That man’s eyes……, he looked as though he was feeling nostalgia from seeing me, as though he was looking at somewhere far away through me. For some reason it weighed slightly on my mind.

***

That day, Kamil and I went until the ruins to gather material.

I was leaving the procurement of materials for potion and hot-air balloon to Kamil, but as expected it would be better for me to go with him. My storage didn’t have any fluctuation of temperature inside it. Making potion with ingredients that were stored inside it would result in product with no unevenness.

I was worried that our fighting force got split up like this, but Elena reasoned with me that it would be more effective if we assigned the right person in the right place.

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▼Kamil　Race：Half Dark Elf♂・Rank 4

【Magic Power：233／260】【Stamina：252／280】

【Overall Combat Strength：1064 (With Body Strenghtening:1298)】

.

If it was Kamil and I then we would be alright even if we ran into rank 5 monster.

His combat strength rivaled even Viro. But I sensed even greater strength than that from Kamil because of the two short swords on his waist──the magic swords.

They weren't [magic power sword] that was only covered with magic power created by the sorcerer guild. Most likely they were an item obtained from dungeon that had "something" dwelling inside them.

It seemed they were memento from his mother, but if she had something like that then I could imagine what kind of standing she had. And it wouldn't be strange if the son was being protected by "someone".

「Kamil.」

「Is there something?」

I was standing guard against the surrounding as I called to Kamil who was harvesting the stomach skin of a desert lizard.

Desert lizard was more or less edible, but it contained a small amount of poisonous substance so not many people ate it other than demihuman with resistance against it. We took a little of it with us for the children who liked meat, but the reason I called out to him wasn't that.

I tossed the crossbow's arrow to the air and Kamil caught it. His complexion changed a little when he saw what it was.

「This is-」

「You know it?」

Who was the person under the monitoring and protection of those parent and daughter?

Chako and the other children who were born in this town were out of the question. Ron who was likely a noble of Carlfan Empire was also a

possibility, but Carlfan Empire was a country of Crus people of human race so it was impossible for a bodyguard from there to be dark elf.

Then naturally the answer came to light. The arrow wasn't created from metal or bone, but special tree sap that even I had never seen directly before. Kamil turned his gaze toward me with a complicated expression after seeing it.

「……Aria, do you know what is this?」

「It's my first time seeing it but, I know where it was created.」

Master had taught me about the weapons and tactics that the evil race used.

That knowledge was something from more than fifty years ago when master was still with the evil race army, that didn't mean the fundamental part had changed drastically.

Kamil's complexion changed color when he understood that the arrow being here meant that it "had been used against someone".

I didn't know what he was hiding but, I believed in him to some degree even then. I wouldn't leave Elena alone in that place if that wasn't the case.

「I……」

Kamil averted his gaze to run away from my gaze that was staring at him wordlessly, but he then seemed to make his decision and opened his mouth──

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「Wait」

I stopped him and pressed my ear on the ground. Kamil noticed what I was doing and he also looked around. He climbed a crumbling building nearby.

I also lifted up my face and said 「There」 while pointing at the west. Kamil focused his sight to there and then he raised his voice.

「Shell dragon!」

Shell dragon had dragon as its name but it wasn't a dragon kind.

It had the appearance of scaled chicken with total height that surpassed adult human. It was a snake type monster that was similar to basilisk.

It was fierce and quick-footed. It breathed out poison mist and it could deflect poorly shot arrow. A troublesome monster, but a rank 3 warrior that was the same rank to it could deal with it without much difficulty as long as they could cope with the poison.

But, that was only if there was just one of it.

「There're five of them!」

「Roger. I'll go ahead.」

The most troublesome aspect of shell dragon was its cowardice. And yet they had low intellect and would go into rampage rather than running away.

The shell dragons caused sand cloud to form around them from their steps. I ran toward them and pointed my fingertip while concentrating.

「──Confusion──」

Level 4 dark sorcery Confusion.

I rarely used it because it had difficulty to affect creature with intelligence. Especially when the opponent had the same or higher rank than the user, its effect was practically nil.

But, it would be a different story if the opponent was lower ranked and was scared toward "something".

The forefront shell dragon that had approached until close by froze. Two other shell dragons ran past it from the sides but, in that moment──

「HAAA!!」

Kamil who had pulled out his two magic swords attacked from above. He rotated with a flowing motion while slashing through the scale covered necks of the two.

It would be difficult for me to slash through such hard scale so easily. But, unlike the time when I was fighting alone, I who had experienced fighting in adventurer party with Rainbow Sword could entrust such thing to other if there was a vanguard with me.

My magic also showed its effect. The confused specimen attacked the remaining two others.

「We're retreating, Aria.」

「Roger.」

Even so we chose to quickly withdraw. Several more shell dragons appeared from behind the shell dragons that were attacking each other. They were also attacked by the shell dragons at the front and it started a chaotic melee.

Why were monsters appearing one after another?

Furthermore they were clearly odd. They had completely lost their senses.

Most likely, there was "something" that forced them to be like that.

「Something's strange with them. I never saw anything like this before.」

「I'll head to town and try to visit the adventurer guild. Perhaps they have information about this.」

「Got it. I'll return back to Ron and others. Be careful.」

The edge of ruins where we were was in this state. It was possible something was going on at the central area.

Kamil and I parted with each other after taking enough distance. I hadn't heard his answer about the "arrow" just now, but right now I had too little

information to make decision including about this shell dragon matter.

For now there should be no problem with the others' protection if Kamil went back there. I assigned even more body strengthening to speed and sprinted through the rough land of the desert with twice the speed of ordinary person.

I crossed the distance that would require two hours for a normal adventurer in one hour.

The beastman adventurers who caught sight of me near the town moved to pull out their sword in surprise, but I had passed them by before they could finish pulling out the blade from the sheath.

Without slowing down I ran up the high wall of the town instead of using the gate. I jumped on rooftop and leaped toward the adventurer guild with absurd speed. Several adventurers near the entrance to the building turned toward me with shocked face when they saw me arriving.

There was no large commotion in town. But, a commotion was occurring inside the guild.

「"Rose"-!!」

A shout came from inside the guild. A short but wide mass of muscle physically pushed aside the crowd and leaped out.

「Jesha?」

「Great timing. How many high class potion can you make? I want as many as possible.」

「The monsters were acting strange even at the ruins. What happened?」

「Talk inside.」

The young guild master looked like she might rush out even now. But Jilgan who came after her reprimand her with the calm tone of veteran.

「Got it. You come too.」

We slipped through the hectic inside of the guild and entered the conference room at the back that was crowded by the staffs. It seemed that something really had happened while I was away for several days from the town.

If the situation was like this then it couldn't be helped. I took out a dozen or so high class potions. Jesha who saw that took them before she started talking about the continuation from before.

「Even us has noticed the monsters at the ruins. It's still not confirmed but it's a stampede.」

Stampede──. It was a phenomenon that happened once every several decades in region or dungeon with a lot of monsters where great amount of monsters appeared.

My parents also got swallowed up by that and died. My face scowled slightly when I recalled that.

But even if a stampede occurred there should be some kind of reason behind it. It was a phenomenon that occurred from the increase of monster's quantity, but monsters wouldn't go into rampage just from that.

Jesha paused for a moment, then she let out a sigh before she spat out her next words.

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「The earth dragon deep inside the ruins……it moved.」

Stampede

Dragon──it was one of the strongest creatures in this world.[Ciel]

Unlike monsters that were plants and animals that transformed due to magic particle, dragon was mythical beast and they even became an object of worship in some areas due to their mighty strength and high intellect. Even children knew of their existence.

But, unlike other mythical beasts, only dragon was well known because other than their mightiness, the biggest reason was their many “variety”.

There were the dragon subspecies wyvern and sea dragon, and then the low ranked dragon, elemental dragon, ancient dragon. Their strength was ranked in that order. And when it came to ancient dragon that had become rank 8 or above, they could use all kinds of dragon magic, and they possessed beauty that resided in their horn, fang, and scale that varied in color depending on their element, which charmed the people.

Therefore people feared and admired the strength of dragon. Many stories were made about them.

A type of that dragon, “earth dragon” had started to move from the depth of the ancient ruins Resvel toward the outskirt.

(……There are too much happening. Is Riezan Family breaking the arrangement and picked a fight with Munza Gang has something to do with this?)

The leader of Hogros Company and the adventurer guild, Jesha Hogros collected her thought inside the meeting room where the staffs were moving around busily.

The first report was brought from several adventurers who returned from their expedition at the early dawn last night.

The outbreak of great number of monster, stampede. Often the reason was the lack of food because of the sweltering heat, but if the stampede happened from Resvel then the most plausible reason was “group panic” because a powerful monster started moving from the depth of the ruins.

One of the possibilities was the existence of “earth dragon” that had been confirmed since around a century ago.

The adventurer’s report mentioned that they heard a [roar that struck fear into their heart] from far away, so the old dwarf, Jilgan who had experience facing the earth dragon just once in the past made a hypothesis that was more like a conclusion that the existence that started moving in the depth of the ruin was the earth dragon.

Dragon’s roar had the effect that struck “panic” into the weak. The roar of pseudo dragon had no such effect, but true dragon, even the low ranked could use the basic dragon magic, [Roar].

The earth dragon had the name “earth” crowning it, but it wasn’t an elemental dragon. The dragon with earth element was the gem dragon. The elemental dragons in this Thurs Continent were only fire dragon, water dragon, ice dragon, and wind dragon. At the very least dragon that was crowned with the name emerald or ruby had never been confirmed.

Earth dragon was a low ranked dragon. It didn’t even have wings to soar in the sky. It would become elemental dragon after spending centuries or millenniums eating elemental magic stone.

It was fortunate that the dragon nesting in Resvel wasn’t rank 7 elemental dragon, but depending on the situation it was also possible that low ranked dragon like earth dragon could become even greater threat than that.

The threat level of earth dragon was rank 6. There would be difference depending on how long it had existed, but its overall combat strength would be more than 4000 at minimum. But, unlike other rank 6 monster earth

dragon had low intellect. There was case where it got manipulated by someone's scheme.

(Is it the evil race making it move……?)

The dark elves who vanished. There was a glimpse of the shadow of evil race behind them. Was their movement matched with the action of Riezan Family? But, if we concluded that they were working together and there was actually another plan at play, we would be put on the back foot.

Then if the dwarves of Hogros Company stayed inside the town to deal with that, would the humans and beastmen be entrusted to deal with the rampaging monsters and earth dragon?

(No!)

Hogros Company was an organization of dwarves. Even Jesha who was one of the children of the company head wouldn't wholeheartedly trust anyone who wasn't dwarf. She was believing that the earth dragon could only be defeated by the dwarf warriors including Jilgan and her.

It was a settled matter that Jesha and around a dozen of dwarves would head out to exterminate the earth dragon. The dwarves below rank 3 and the other races could be told to deal with the other monsters.

But──.

.

「……」

Ahead of Jesha's gaze was just one person, a "human" whose existence couldn't be ignored.

That girl's name was Aria. She was a Melsenian woman with white skin which was rare in this region where Cruz people with dark skin color was the norm.

Jesha first heard about Aria from Jilgan who was her confidant and also chaperone. She was surprised when she heard him saying 『There's an interesting human woman』 and became curious.

Jilgan should have eliminated her on the spot if she was an existence that would become danger. But Jilgan didn't fight that woman. Was there no value at all in killing the woman, or was there other reason?

But that woman who was an adventurer never showed herself in the guild since then. When Jesha's curiosity was starting to fade, one of Munza Gang's elders, Kushmu contacted with a proposition that as an apology for laying their hands on the adventurer who caught Jilgan's eye, they would yield exclusive supply of high class potion which was a precious item in this desert.

That adventurer who got into conflict with Munza Gang was none other than Aria. She was also the alchemist who could create high class potion.

She could understand why Munza Gang made a move on Aria if she was a skilled alchemist. As the result, Aria also got into quarrel with Kirly Company and as apology, Munza Gang apparently struck a deal with her that they would introduce a sales route to her.

Why Munza Gang that was in charge of the beastmen thugs ended up acting like that against just a single adventurer even though doing that could cause others to see them as "weak"?

Kushmu himself told her the reason. Jesha thought that perhaps he was joking when he heard it.

This town didn't have "long range communication magic tool" which was the fastest method to send information. Its main way to obtain information was through the "rumors" that the merchants brought.

But, the rumors were mainly about the neighboring Carlfan Empire or United Kingdom of Ganzal. Rumors about other countries wouldn't reach this far except of "interesting story" like assassination of king or the like.

There was the story of [Ash Crowned Princess] among those interesting stories.

Certainly she thought it was an interesting story. According to the story, a child joined an assassin guild, then she destroyed a single branch and turned the whole assassin guild into her enemy. She didn't stop there and also picked a fight with the thief guild.

Those two were huge organizations that anyone, whether commoner or the underworld knew to absolutely never go against them. But this child faced the assassin guild and the thief guild head on and still lived even now…… the story was that kind of urban legend.

This kind of story was more interesting than hearing about a king from somewhere becoming deranged. It became a good topic for drinking and it seemed natural that the rumor was spreading even until this faraway place.

But when she was told that the actual person of that urban legend was in this town, it made Jesha thought that she was seriously being made fun of and she almost smashed her precious wooden table with her fist.

Kushmu told her that Aria faced a pack of 200 beastmen head one and emerged the victor.

Although she was taking the story with a grain of salt, Jesha questioned herself if she would also be able to do the same if she faced a hundred people. Perhaps if it was just fighting them then she could. But she had no confidence that she would be able to survive. Furthermore if rank 4 Batil and Tous Brothers whose names were known even to Jesha were also present there, she couldn't imagine just how it was possible to win.

There was no way anyone with normal nerve could do such thing. She thought that Kushmu only exaggerated a gossip and she asked some other beastman adventurers. But she saw how they were more scared of that one girl rather than of Jesha or Jilgan. They called that woman [Desert Rose] and wouldn't say anything more.

They said that her figure made them thought of a single “rose” blooming in the middle of the desiccated desert.

Jesha thought “I see” when she saw Aria appearing for the first time in the adventurer guild. She could understand how those beastmen had such impression.

Pinkish blond hair was unusual not only among Melsenia woman, but even among forest elf. For the people of this area who were used to see black or brown hair, she truly looked like a “rose flower” in bloom.

Rose didn’t grow in desert. That was why the people of the desert prized “a single rose” that had been processed with sorcery that was brought by merchant as offering to organization even more than jewels.

For the people of the desert, “rose” was the symbol of beauty and admiration.

Aria was so young that she looked like she had just become of age. Her lithe figure that didn’t look like the build of a warrior at all made her looked like a noble daughter.

But Jesha thought 『This girl is bad news』 the moment she saw Aria.

A pretty blade? Wrong, this woman wasn’t anything like that. She was a sweet “trap” that lured prey and spread out deadly poison the moment she was touched.

The men in the guild was led astray by that appearance and underestimated her, but as a fellow female Jesha sensed her danger instinctually.

That combat strength wasn’t inferior even when compared to Jilgan who had fought at the frontline for dozens of years. But more than that, Jesha felt “something” shining deep inside those eyes. It made her realized that all the “rumors” she had heard until now were the truth.

She mustn’t make this woman her enemy──she thought.

.

The winning chance would definitely improve if Aria joined the dragon extermination. But as a daughter of Hogros Company, she couldn't possibly let non-dwarf to accomplish great feat that surpassed them.

Personally Jesha could identity somewhat with Aria as fellow female warrior. Her relaxed attitude toward Aria was also only half acting, half her genuine feeling.

She held such sympathy but, this desert town Cutlass had to be protected by Hogros Company's dwarves no matter what.

As Jesha of Hogros Company, if possible she wanted to limit Aria's involvement only as potion supplier, but as a guild master she thought that not making good use of Aria's combat strength was a bad move.

But at the same time Jesha understood that Aria wouldn't listen to the guild's demand anyway.

In that case what would be the best way to make use of Aria──.

「Aria, you can go protect what you want to protect.」

***

Jesha told me to move based on my own judgment as adventurer.

From the start my first priority was Elena's safety. To achieve that I wouldn't hesitate even if I had to fight a dragon, but I considered that Jesha's words were hiding something.

Kushmu was killed by Riezan Family. At the same time the dark elves who were strong to some degree in this city vanished. And then a stampede was happening now…….

The start of this was me getting into conflict with Munza Gang and caused a hole to open in Munza Gang's security. Riezan Family noticed that and made their move. That was how most people in this town saw it. But I was thinking that Riezan Family had been waiting for any chance to appear since the start.

Jesha was thinking that something was happening in this town.

The parent and daughter who I met the other day told me to leave this town as quickly as possible.

I didn't know if they were referring to this stampede. But then there was no benefit for Riezan Family in this. Did they just want to crush one of the four organizations? If their objective was this town itself……?

Most likely the dark elves who vanished knew the answer to this.

.

I put on my cloak again and ran through the town in order to return back to the watchtower that was our base.

I didn't notice on my way here but, perhaps the information about stampede was starting to reach the town. I could see merchants closing their shop to start running away.

I didn't see anyone who seemed to be adventurer inside the town. They must have received the request from adventurer guild and headed out to deal with the monsters. But many of the people inside the town were also holding weapon. Was it because they were sensing the danger and acted as befitting as the hot-blooded residents of this town?

「……」

On my way of leaving the town, I suddenly felt something out of place and stopped running.

Kirly Company that was mere merchant prioritized profit and didn't choose to fight. Hogros Company and Munza Gang were sending their force to fight the stampede.

But, who were the armed bunch at the corner of the town……?

I slowly approached them.

Perhaps they noticed the abnormality that was going on in the town but didn't understand what was actually happening, so they were doing what they could do to focus on defense. But in that case, if they were residents of this town, where did they got those spears and swords of somewhat good quality that should be outside the price range of low ranked adventurer?

「……What're you looking at huuh?」

A Cruz person with tanned darkish skin threatened me with a stern face.

There were five Cruz people and one man who was hiding his face with a hood……. But, that hooded man was radiating the strongest "presence" despite being the thinnest.

I approached them until a distance where their weapon wouldn't reach me before calling out to them.

「Nothing……. I just thinking why's there a dark elf here when all of them had vanished.」

The hooded man instantly radiated killing intent while the men readied their weapon all at once.

It seemed that I hit bull's eye.

Omen of Upheaval

The hooded man seemed to be a dark elf. The instant I saw through his true identity, killing intent burst out from the dark elf. At the same time the Cruz people around him drew out their weapon and attacked.

Single edge long sword, long and narrow spear. The weapons in their possession couldn't be called self-defense tool anymore. They were clearly objects that were made for the purpose of killing human.

「Uruaa!」

The Cruz person with stern face who called out to me at the beginning slashed with his cutlass. I parried that blade by entangling it in my cloak. The man who had closed the distance opened his mouth in shock.

「Woman……who're you?」

「I should be asking you that? Why are you attacking just because I mentioned dark elf?」

「……Shaddup, just die-」

The man tried to forcefully pull out his entangled blade. I let it go while kicking him away and opened the distance. The dark elf who was watching from behind spoke up in irritation.

「Don't make a ruckus. Kill her quickly.」

This location was out of sight. But a commotion here would draw people's attention.

As I thought, these guys were here with some purpose in mind. If this hooded man was one of the dark elves who disappeared from town, it was possible that there was evil race's involvement here.

But, I had no time to ponder about that. The remaining for Cruz people attacked in respond to the dark elf's words.

「Daaa!」

One man thrust with a very flexible thin spear. Like the other weapons of his friends, this kind of weapon would be more effective against civilian rather than monster or armored soldier.

I spread out my cloak widely as though to make it bloat up the moment the spear was thrust forward. The spear tip thrust through the empty space under the cloak. At the same time I moved forward and stabbed the spear user's throat using a sharp hidden weapon that I pulled out from my palm's "shadow" until it reached his brain.

When facing multiple opponents, there was a tactic of dealing only wound to rob an opponent's combat capability to turn them into burden for the rest. But it would be faster to kill right away when their number was only this many.

I assumed that the first Cruz person was rank 3. The remaining Cruz people had combat strength around 200……seemed like they were upper rank 2. I had no business with small fries. I had also lost any reason to be merciful after they had drawn out their weapon. I only needed their two superiors alive for interrogation.

GO-……!

The spear user collapsed. I used his body as cover to threw weighted pendulum above before swinging it down. It smashed the skull of the man who was observing from behind while holding a two-handed cutlass.

「B-bitch, how dare you!」

The first man who I kicked back until he fell on his butt raised his cutlass while his swarthy skin darkened seeing his comrades getting killed one after another.

「Wait, something's strange with that girl!」

「Shaddup you long-eared bastard! Don't order me around!」

The man ignored the dark elf's warning and attacked once more.

It seemed that the Crus people and the dark elf were ally but weren't comrade.

I stopped the remaining two Cruz people with my stare while parrying the blade of the first man who I had designated as information source with my black knife. I smoothly slipped through the attack toward him and elbowed his face.

「Gugoh!?」

Blood scattered from the man's nose and mouth and he staggered behind for several meters before falling on his knee.

「……T-this bitch-」

He was a tough guy, but he shouldn't be able to move for a while.

I started moving again to eliminate the rest first, but in that moment the bloody man grinned at the corner of my eye and I heard the dark elf "rhyming" chant of spell.

「Hah, drop dead you bi……」

Flame magic particles swelled up from behind the man who spat those words.

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「──Fire Arrow──」

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Four Fire Arrows were fired simultaneously from the dark elf. I leaped to the side after noticing the spell's rhyme and dodged them.

It was advanced sorcery that fired the same sorcery multiple times simultaneously. But, only one of them was fired at me. The other three Fire Arrows hit the backs of the other three who were focused on me.

「Guaa!?」

Even level 1 Fire Arrow would be lethal if it hit vital spot from behind. The man who was convinced that I was taken by surprise and they won became a ball of flames after the sorcery hit the back of his head. He collapsed while staring at me with an expression of disbelief.

「Tsk」

The dark elf who killed his own allies clicked his tongue and turned his back on me.

Most likely he guessed that his chance of victory was thin with only the small fries with him and he changed his objective to silence them. I too swept aside my skirt and pulled out a throwing knife and threw it in the same motion but, I was a moment late and the knife hit the wall of the alley the dark elf ran into.

I immediately ran after him. But I didn't see the dark elf who should be in the alley anywhere. When I searched his presence with Search, I caught a glimpse of a cloak's tip fluttering at the rooftop of a two-storied building before it was gone.

I threw up my scythe type pendulum and caught the edge of the rooftop with it so I could run up the wall quickly. A Fire Arrow was shot at me the instant I got on the rooftop. But it was a tactic that I had also done before when running away so I was prepared.

「──Shield──」

The Shield that I instantly created diverted the Fire Arrow.

「What-!?」

The dark elf was astonished seeing that. He hurriedly moved to jump to another building, but at that time I too had finished composing my spell.

「──Pain──」

「Gyaaaaaaaah!?」

His foot got tangled because of the sudden intense pain and he fell from the roof.

I chased after him and jumped down from the roof too. The dark elf apparently got broken leg on the ground. His hood had fallen off, even so he glared with me with his tanned face.

「Why……do you know that sorcery? Shield is known only by few even among us……」

「For you to know it means that you're an evil race just as I thought.」

The Shield sorcery that I used was passed down to me from master who was formerly the [War Demon] of the evil race army. In that case someone who knew of that sorcery could only be an evil race just like master.

「……kuh」

The dark elf male shut his mouth after unintentionally leaking out information. But his attitude made me convinced.

There was a risk that master's survival could become known by evil race with me using her sorcery, but it was too late thinking about that right now because many of my tactic and fighting style originated from evil race.

If my opponent was someone who mustn't learn about it then I just needed to eliminate them. Before that I needed to learn just what was the dark elf scheming and took out my scythe type pendulum. The dark elf male was

glaring at me while sweating heavily, but his expression suddenly turned blank in resignation and he crunched the pendant hanging on his neck with his teeth.

「Guoo……」

「Tsu」

The man vomited a lot of blood and fell face down. ……Poison huh. It seemed that he committed suicide before information could be extracted from him. What was the reason he went that far to hide it?

Most likely that necklace itself was a crystallization of poison or a small container made from resin filled with poison. But……for him to instantly kill himself without even fighting back, it was possible that there was a really big plan at work by the evil race.

I went to the street and searched for presence. I found several spots where groups like this dark elf and Cruz people were lurking. I couldn't deal with all of them. It would be pointless if I tried to interrogate them and they committed suicide. Even if wanted to tell Jesha about this, she should have already departed at this time.

Monster outbreak. Earth dragon moving. Riezan Family and evil race's relation……. I had no time to investigate all of them, and most likely things were already moving.

「……I don't have enough information.」

These were concerning matters but, I had something that I should prioritize more. For now I ran toward the base where Elena was staying in order to accomplish my own role.

***

「Why is it here-!」

Kamil ran into a monster on his way back to the base.

It had large humanoid body that was easily over two meters and skin that was hard like rock. It had head that looked like twisted human with two horns……this monster that had sand colored skin to blend with the desert was a type of ogre that lived in this region, “Sand Ogre”.

Even normal ogre would be powerful monster that was classified from upper rank 3 to lower rank 4. The rank 4 sand ogre that lived in this region should be found only at the depth of ancient ruins Resvel.

Very rarely several ogres would separate from their band and went outside the ruins, but Kamil only ran into one. Most likely this specimen was wandering out from the ruins from getting chased by something just like those shell dragons.

『GUOOOOOOOOOOO!!』

Ogre was man-eater demon. It seemed this specimen was hungry and let out a roar of delight when it finally found a prey. It was already a powerful monster from the get go, but this one was even more troublesome because it was in the possession of a rusty great sword with broken tip. It seemed to have found it from somewhere.

「……」

Kamil judged that that fight was unavoidable and pulled out his two magic swords with a blank expression.

They were practically even strength wise. But more important that the danger level was that this man-eating monster couldn’t be allowed to get near the base where Ron and the others were staying at.

『Gaa……』

The sand ogre saw the change in Kamil’s atmosphere and changed the way it looked at the human before him from “meat” to “enemy”.

『GUOOO!』

「HAAH!」

GAKIN!!

The broken great sword and magic sword clashed. Sparks of mana spread out.

The blade of the great sword got chipped from the clash, but Kamil got blown away from the difference in strength parameter.

But Kamil used even that power and switched into counterattack. He rotated centered around himself and his other magic sword that didn't block the attack slashed the sand ogre's arm.

Gishi……!

『GAAAAAA-』

The sand ogre's face twisted into a laugh from receiving Kamil's attack. Certainly the magic sword's blade got the sand ogre's arm, but it couldn't deeply cut into the sand ogre's skin that was as hard as rock.

「……tsu」

Kamil also didn't force himself to continue attacking and took some distance for a moment.

It wasn't just hard. Most likely their fighting experience also differed. Just like how there was a different in real battle experience between Aria and Kamil despite them being the same rank, this sand ogre that had combat strength nearly 1000 was also surpassing him in real battle experience. Kamil was forced to recognize that.

Even Kamil had a way to close the gap of experience. But, he would need a little bit of time for that. It would be a high risk gamble to do that in front of this sand ogre.

『!?』

GIN!

At that moment, something like an arrow that flew from somewhere got deflected by the ogre's skin.

A small cloaked person suddenly leaped out from behind a rocky spot and ran in circle to the side while quickly reloading their crossbow to fire arrow in succession.

『GUGAAAAAAAAAA!』

The sand ogre roared furiously by the sudden intrusion while deflecting the arrows with its broken great sword. But, another intruder appeared using that opening and struck the sand ogre's back of head with an object that looked like a club.

『GAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!』

Even the sand ogre slightly staggered from that. It roared angrily and turned its attention to the intruders. The combat strength of the intruders was around rank 3. It would be difficult for them to win against this sand ogre with that, but their intrusion created an opening for Kamil to use his "trump card".

「──[Release] ──」

The special activation word liberated the seal on Kamil's two magic swords.

The "experience" that was accumulated inside the magic swords flowed into Kamil. He endured the unpleasant feeling of the encroachment into his brain while leaping forward and used the "skill" that was engraved into the magic swords.

.

「──Dancing Reaper──!」

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『GUOOOOOOOOOOO!?』

It was a surge of eight consecutive attacks that was like a rotating dance using two short swords.

The sand ogre was dragged into a vortex of blade slashes that cut up its skin. Then it collapsed on the dry ground and scattered its blood around.

「……tsu」

The drastic usage of strength made Kamil felt pain in his two arms and he groaned.

The magic swords' ability was [experience storage]. Level 5 short sword art's Battle Skill [Dancing Reaper] was engraved inside it. It didn't only have Battle Skill but also technique engraved in it, but naturally there would be backlash to the body if low ranked person used it.

「……Are you okay?」

「Kadri……? Izel?」

Kamil took off his hood and exposed his face. Then he turned his gaze on the Cruz person and dark elf father-daughter.

Kadri and Izel smiled slightly when he called their names. They approached Kamil and kneeled on the ground with bowed head.

「We came to pick you up……your highness.」

***

「Aria……」

Elena was staring outside from a window of the crumbling watchtower while muttering with a small voice.

She was constantly worrying about Aria, but she trusted her more than anyone else in this world. But, today the unpleasant stirring inside her chest just wouldn't clear up no matter what.

Elena didn't have any power like Gift. Even so she was originally a sorcerer of four elements though now it was only three elements after her fire element was erased. Her rank had stopped at rank 3 but, Elena's magic power control had reached level 4 when she had four elements.

.

▼Elena Claydale (First Princess) 【Race: Human♀】【Rank 3】

【Magic Power: ２５０／２５０】【Stamina: １３５／１３５】

【Strength: ７】【Endurance: ８】【Agility: 12】【Dexterity: ８】

《Light Sorcery Level 3》《Water Sorcery Level 3》《Fire Sorcery Level 3》《Wind Sorcery Level 3》

《Non-Elemental Magic Level 1》《Daily Life Magicx5》《Magic Power Control Level 4》

《Pressure Level 2》《Poison Resistance Level 1》

《Simple Appraisal》

【Overall Combat Strength: ４８０ (Sorcery Attack Power: ５７６)】

.

Then Elena unconsciously turned a grim gaze toward the direction of the ancient ruins. Perhaps she sensed the abnormality of the magic particles that were filling the air. The sight in that direction far away looked misty.

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「Do you see something, "Lena"?」

「……Are you resting, "Ron"?」

Ron who was repairing the balloon on the rooftop went down. Elena replied to him with a smile that drew a line between them somewhere.

Both Elena and Ron had noticed that both of them were using fake name. Ron was most likely a noble of a country somewhere, and he too should have noticed that Elena was a noble.

Elena too had faith with Ron and Kamil's personality after getting involved with them. But, as a noble she also couldn't possibly trust someone who wouldn't even tell her his real name.

(I'm the same though……)

It was her nature as noble that caused her to purposefully draw a line between the two of them, but Elena unconsciously laughed at herself with how troublesome all of it was. Aria too didn't wholeheartedly trust them but, after watching how attached the children were to them, she at least had enough trust to entrust Elena to them although there was still calculation in that decision.

Elena too would never think about staying together with them if not for the young children and Chako who were taking care of them.

Naturally Ron and Kamil were also being wary of them to some degree, Elena thought, but…….

「Aa~……I'm, is there anything that bother you? Life in desert is hard right?」

「Yes, I'm fine……but?」

Recently, Elena was feeling that Ron's behavior had softened, especially since she started taking care of the children.

His softening wasn't as radical as Kamil toward Aria, but perhaps his trust on her was increasing from her true self that she showed to the children.

(The children are adorable after all……)

Elena too didn't intend to show her true self. But, the dark elf Noi was slightly older and shy so he wouldn't get really close to him, but the dwarf Rana and the dog beastman Nar were infants. They had gotten attached to Elena and often followed her around clinging on her.

But, ……there were also times when his improved good will became problematic.

「……Lena-oneechan」

「My, what's the matter Rana?」

The dwarf little girl Rana who was still four years old was climbing up the stair looking like she was going to cry. She thought that she was still napping, but she must had woken up and saw that Chako who went to do far work hadn't returned back.

「Did you see a scary dream?」

「No, that's not it……Nar went outside.」

「……Eh?」

Nar was still three years old. He was a boy and a beastman so he was far more active compared to human infant, even so he was still too small to go outside alone.

「Where did Nar go? Since when he was gone?」

Elena hid her anxiety while meeting Rana's gaze and asked her gently. Rana bit her lower lip and looked like she was going to cry.

「Umm, Nar, he, went to pick some herb……」

「Herb……?」

「It was my fault-. Because I told him, that crimson grass with strange smell can be found at rocky place」

「Ah……」

Elena also recalled from those words.

Red grass. It had a proper name but, it was a succulent plant that grew in a certain place of this desert. Unlike things that were used as food in this region, that red grass could become ingredient for high class potion if it processed with a special way.

Unlike Death Root that bloomed at place with miasma, this one was relatively easy to gather because one didn't need to go as far as the ruins to find it, but most likely Nar overheard Kamil and Aria talked about the ingredients gathering and noticed that they didn't have enough red grass.

And then Nar thought what an infant like him could possibly do and took action.

He didn't just wait quietly using his age as excuse and searched for something that he could do, then he took action for the sake of everyone here.

「I'm sorry……」

「Rana……」

Elena hugged Rana who started to cry. She hadn't done anything wrong at all. But, if Nar got injured or worse then it would definitely leave a trauma in her heart.

「Lena, I'll go look for him.」

「Ron-」

Ron who was listening to the story said that with none of his usual light smile.

Two people with combat skill would gather ingredients, create high class potion and sold it for money, gather material, and fix the hot-air balloon. That was the decision of the senior group including Elena and Ron.

He must be feeling responsibility for talking carelessly in front of the children just because they were still too young.

Perhaps Ron was also feeling an anxiety that couldn't be explained in his heart just like Elena.

「……」

Nar's action. Ron's sense of responsibility. Seeing that made Elena thought.

Elena and Aria had no responsibility at all for the children. It was Ron and Kamil who decided to help the children because they couldn't abandon them. Elena and Aria's purpose was to notify their country of their survival and return home. Everything other than that was of secondary importance.

But, would that be the right choice in the end……?

Elena's return to the country would be to prevent the division among nobles. She believed that any sacrifice that was made for that would be a necessary sacrifice.

Elena had to return back for the sake of her country's people no matter what she had to discard in the process.

But, how much she could discard? How far she had to discard her "heart" in order to prioritize achieving her objective?

King was a lonely existence. Even "themselves" were included in things to be sacrificed.

Even an infant was doing what he could in order to survive. Everyone here was acting as one and struggling together. Meanwhile Elena who had decided that she would sacrifice even herself for the sake of her people would only sit and wait. Would that really be the right thing to do as a [queen]?

What then made her different than that big brother who was just sitting around waiting for the crown to come to him?

She would save the children. She would save everyone here. On top of that she would accomplish her objective. If she couldn’t even do that much, who would want to follow such flimsy [queen]?

Elena made her decision.

「Ron……I will also come with you.」

The Meaning of King

「Lena!?」

Ron raised his voice with some bewilderment hearing “Lena” saying that she would also go outside to search for the child.

Ron was going to personally search for Nar because he thought it was necessary as the one who decided to shelter the kids. But, Lena was with them here with the purpose of avoiding danger. He was vaguely thinking that she would choose to stay behind.

And yet why did Lena choose to head to a dangerous place by her own choice?

Ron was suspecting that the girl who called herself [Lena] was a noble of foreign country.

She was hiding it but, her appearance, her behavior, and then her having a bodyguard of that level who was the same age and same gender with her. It was impossible that she wasn’t a noble.

He suspected Lena and Aria as spy when he first saw them. There were people who gave off that kind of atmosphere among the wandering merchants, though he never interacted with that kind of people.

But that suspicion immediately vanished. Because the two girls who looked like a young lady of good family and her bodyguard were too conspicuous in various aspects.

If he wanted to doubt them then there would no end to it but, if he looked at them without any suspicion, then it would be valid to think that they were noble from somewhere who got dragged into an accident or incident.

If that was the case then he could understand why they wanted to escape from this town.

Ron too didn't want to get involved with them at first, but after learning their capability he thought whether it would be possible to make use of them for his own purpose. Kamil who was working together with Ron because of a certain reason seemed to feel touched by the words and actions of the bodyguard girl Aria, but Ron was more interested with the discernment and negotiation ability that Lena possessed.

Ron was a noble of Carlfan Empire. His age gap with his older brothers was wide, but there was a possibility that his life would be targeted by the members of his brothers' factions as long as his own standing wasn't clear.

Because of that Ron made a gamble with undertaking a dangerous mission by himself. Originally he was someone in a position that wouldn't be allowed to go off by himself, but what made it possible was because the members of his brothers' factions who were working from behind the scene. It was something that he noticed later on.

He was permitted to make use of the hot-air balloon that was the only one in existence and headed to this place. He was attacked by the servants who were serving as his bodyguards, but he was able to survive by destroying the hot-air balloon himself.

Most likely those servants had also gotten won over by his brothers' factions. The servants died during the balloon's fall. Ron who was the only survivor started to struggle in order to survive in this town.

Nearly two years had passed since Ron came to this town. He couldn't even contact his home country. The limit should be near before he was thought dead and his noble status was written off. Before that happened he would definitely return home alive. His reasoning to escape from this town was the same with Lena and Aria, but Ron was feeling that the "reason" that he could feel from them was different from his.

Ron had gotten attached toward the orphans in these two years. He understood that he couldn't save everything, but he couldn't abandon

Chako and others who he became acquainted with. Kamil must also be the same like him in that respect.

Most likely this wasn't the right way of thinking for noble. But, in the eyes of Lena who was looking straight into Ron, even though she was saying the same word [save] like him, it was different from Ron. It felt like she had a wider field of vision just like Ron's father.

At first he only thought of her as a mere "noble lady".

After living together here, he came to understand that her true smile was that of a lovely girl, and when he noticed his gaze was always following her figure.

But, this younger girl understood the meaning of being a noble even more than himself.

「……Got it. Let's go Lena.」

「Yes-」

***

「All hands, go all out-!!」

『OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!』

Jesha's voice that was filled with fighting spirit resounded. The adventurers of the adventurer guild yelled back.

They were the adventurers who were mobilized to deal with the stampede.

Rock dwarves holding huge shield and axe, mountain dwarves holding halberd, it was a force of dwarf heavy warrior. Contrastive to them was the group of bastman light warrior that was centered around Munza Gang members equipped with sword or spear. Including the humans there were more than 150 adventurers of rank 2 and above here. They were marching toward the ancient ruins Resvel.

But…….

「……Tsk, something stinks.」

Jesha was carrying two hand axes made from magic steel that she rested on her shoulders. She looked at the adventurers who were following her order and spat out that murmur.

There was no problem with the dwarves who were her long time subordinates. The beastmen who were showing abnormal urge for fight were also under the leadership of Munza Gang that formed an agreement with them once more after the “rose” incident last time.

But for the rest of the force, with the disappearance of the dark elves, around twenty percent of this force was made up of human adventurers. She was catching glimpses of unsettled emotion from them.

「Young lady……」

「I know Jilgan.」

Jesha replied at the voice of her chaperone who was walking at her side with a tone that was holding back her irritation.

Unlike the sturdy dwarf or beastman, not many human became adventurer in this desert’s harsh environment. There were some of them but, most of them were orphans or out of luck people who were unable to make ends meet. Those low ranked adventurers would only get in their way even if they came.

Even so, the rank 2 of those few human adventurers were participating in this quest but, she could feel a disquieting atmosphere from some of them.

「I can’t speak it out loud. ……Is it Riezan Family?」

「It’s fine if you know.」

「Hmph」

Jesha scoffed at Jilgan who was treating her like a kid.

Jesha too was nothing more than a little girl who just became of age if her age was translated into human age. She understood that it was pointless for her to grumble at Jilgan who had been chaperoning her for nearly thirty years.

(……Whoops, this ain't the time for that.)

Hogros Company was a company in the occupation of selling weapon and armor and doing smithing work, but it also had the role of protecting this town from external enemy as adventurer guild. Nobody was asking them to do that, but exactly because they were fulfilling that role that they were showing off their fighting strength and could act overbearingly in this town despite being the organization with fewest members among the four factions.

Because of that Hogros Company had to stop the stampede this time no matter what. Their dignity was on the line. Even if the cause was really the earth dragon that should be in the depth of the ruins, Jesha had no intention of retreating for even a single step.

She could feel the purpose of the people maneuvering behind the scene coiling around them like sand. Perhaps it was the evil race or Riezan Family……. It was dangerous to make conclusion without any proof but she also couldn't let her guard down.

But, if the objective of those people was to send away Jesha and others, Hogros Company and the adventurers from the town…….

「What should we do with those shady guys?」

「I assigned them to the rear just in case. But, I don't know whether it's the right move with how we're in the dark in regard to their objective.」

「Yeah……」

Midway they took rest just once for eating, then the adventurers started walking once more.

In this region a subtype of shell dragon that was relatively calm was used in the place of horse, but it was impossible to gather them quickly in sufficient number for this many people. Because of that usually adventurer travelled by walking almost without any rest. Considering that aspect it was judged that making the humans stayed in the rear to protect the food supply that was loaded in the dragon carriage would be the appropriate decision.

And then several hours later──.

「Guild master! There's sand cloud far ahead!」

「It's here huh!」

A beastwoman who looked like female leopard and had went ahead as scout reported to Jesha. She put on a hearty smile hearing that.

The cloud of sand was visible even from this far away which showed there were just that many monsters running out of control. But, Jesha still smiled despite that because swinging her battle axe suited her more rather than tediously thinking of the plan in details.

「Men, form the line!! Shield bearing rock dwarf is at the front. Stop them even if you die! Mountain dwarf standby behind and annihilate them the moment they get stopped! Beastmen, go wild and murder them!!」

『OOOOOOOOOOOO!!』

「Guild master, there aren't just men here!」

Several female beastmen including the scout just now raised their voice playfully.

Jesha fundamentally prized her fellow dwarves more in the guild, even so she also often personally gave quest when it was convenient to the few female adventurers in Cutlass. Right now she had formed a relaxed relationship with them to some degree despite their different species.

「It ain't the time for joke! First let's slow them down with sorcery!」

The majority of those female adventurers were sorcerer. With Jesha's command the beastman and human sorcerers started preparing their sorcery behind the shielders.

「I see them now!」

Approaching them while causing thick cloud of sand to rise behind was the fast-footed shell dragons and some insect monsters that could fly.

Jesha confirmed that no desert lizard or the like that was strong against heat was among the group of monster. She ordered the sorcerers to chant fire spell.

「Stop their momentum-, fire!!」

***

「──Air Bullet──」

The wind bullet that Elena fired tore away several beetles from the ground, exposing their stomach part.

「Taaa!」

Ron closed the distance in that moment and slashed the stomach or lop off the head from their lower jaw with his sword.

Even if she was alone Elena could possibly defeat the monsters if she used powerful spell. Even so she had learned to fight while preserving her mana when she was accompanied by a warrior to be the vanguard.

Ron wasn't as strong as Kamil, even so he had experience surviving in this town for two years. His strength had reached rank 3.

But, there was color of anxiety on Ron's expression even after defeating several monsters easily.

「I can't believe there're monsters even here……」

「Yes. Something is strange. Let's hurry.」

The information about large outbreak of monsters that caused stampede still hadn't reached the two.

Both Elena and Ron trusted the bad premonition that they felt on their skin and they were on their guard. But, Ron was feeling anxious partly because of Nar, and partly because of his pride as a man from dragging Elena into this kind of situation.

But, a woman of Claydale wasn't that weak.

Perhaps the previous Elena would feel some anxiety in this situation, but the current her who had resolved herself was able to maintain her composure to a degree that surprised even herself.

(The me from before……had the resolve to die, but not the resolve to put my life on the line wasn't I……)

As a princess, in case Elena judged that her brother the crown prince was "unfit" to be king, she had resolved herself to become a [stopgap queen], where she would either raise the crown prince's son or a relative of the royal family to become the next king.

The little Elena directly appealed to her father the king how that would be the best way seeing that she was sickly and unable to give birth to a child, but thinking back now she saw that it was just a passive resolve……an escapist resolve.

Even if that decision would be good for the country, it wouldn't be good for the "people".

She would choose death rather than being used by her political enemy, for the sake of the nation. But wasn't that just "running away"? If she was really thinking about the people, then she should struggle to live as a princess.

She was thinking that even that big brother who was raised by that peace-loving idiot first queen which made him grew to only have the awareness at the level of a third son of a count house would become quite a good king if Elena was at his side assisting him.

But, if he was really thinking of the good of the people, was there a need to make that big brother to be the king?

Elena's body was already healed. In that case "who" should be the king then?

A king was a solitary existence. But they couldn't establish a country on their own.

A nation could only stand when the solitary king had earnest retainers supporting them.

The adults who paid tax. The children who were helping them and would succeed them later down the road. The nobles protecting them. All of them were the "people" that the king ought to love. Anyone who preyed on them, even if they were also people of the country was enemy.

That was why, the young Nar too who wished to be of help for her and tried to do that by his own will even without knowing that she was a princess, to Elena he was already a retainer that she ought to cherish.

Even so, she had the resolve to discard him.

Even so, she had the resolve to put her life on the line.

She wouldn't be moved by her emotion. Even so, Elena thought that how many people she could save with her hands would decide "the size of her caliber" as someone who had decided to stand as a queen.

.

「Lena, look over there!」

They could see a pack of monster near the rocky place that was their destination. The place where Nar headed to.

「……We cannot face them all. Let us circle around as much as possible, secure Nar, and then make our escape.」

「Guess that's the only way……」

The red grass that Nar was searching was growing en masse around here.

There would be no problem if Nar had only taken the amount that his small hands could take and then left. Any child who lived around this area should know how to escape even if they ran into monster.

But, the more monster there was, there was a risk that escape was impossible even if the monster was the slow caterpillar.

「This is……」

They circled around the monsters and kept moving. Midway, they found a caterpillar that was crushed by something thin like a stick.

「……Is there also adventurer here?」

「No, there're marks of it getting hit many times. Perhaps, this was done by someone who lived around here.」

「Can there be anyone living in this kind of place? In that case, perhaps Nar has also run away toward that place.」

「……I, guess.」

Elena's face brightened after finding some hope. In contrast Ron was speaking a bit vaguely.

「Don't, expect too much okay.」

「……?」

Ron headed toward that place where someone might be living. He seemed to know the location. Elena too realized the reason of Ron's vague words.

Frankly speaking, the residents in this place might be the bottom rung of this town in the bad sense.

「「「……」」」

Several "eyes" were looking toward the two warily.

They weren't weakling. But they also weren't strong. It was because they were half-baked like that they couldn't join any of the four organizations, but their useless pride also didn't allow them to do lowly work like the weak.

They could only live by taking away from the weak like children or old man, and living in hiding from the strong. They were that kind of people.

There were around ten humans. They looked scared at the appearance of the armed Ron and Elena. They readied their clubs that looked handmade.

「W-who the hell are you guys?」

「We are looking for our acquaintance. He is a beastman boy. Have any of you perhaps seen him around here?」

「D-dunno……if that's all then scram already.」

A middle-aged man averted his gaze from Elena.

Elena sensed that the man knew something based from how he acted. But Ron pulled on Elena's sleeve to stop her from asking any further.

「Let's go. We better not provoke them too much.」

「But……」

「It's fine. I think I have an idea.」

When Elena spoke the words 『beastman boy』, Ron saw several of the residents turned their gaze toward a certain direction.

「Let's hurry. I'm afraid they used him as bait.」

「……」

Elena gulped hearing Ron's words. She also hurried up heading toward that direction. And then not long after they heard the voice of a small child.

「Nar-!?」

「At the other side!」

The two broke into a run and less than ten seconds later, they heard the familiar voice of a child and found the figure of Nar. He had climbed up a rock and currently he was throwing rock fragments on several caterpillars that were going up the rock.

「──Water Ball──!」

Elena quickly fired a mass of water to push away the caterpillars.

「Ron!」

Ron reacted to her voice and rushed toward the washed away caterpillars. Meanwhile Elena secured Nar.

「Nar!」

「Lena-neechan!」

Nar noticed her and jumped from the rock into Elena's embrace. His body was dirty but there wasn't any wound on it. Elena looked relieved seeing that and peered into Nar's eyes.

「I am glad you are alright. Why……did you go out alone?」

「Umm, look this!」

Nar responded to Elena's question by proudly showing her a sack that was filled to the brim with red grass.

「We need this right? I found, lots of them!」

「Nar……」

Pechin

Elena looked like she wanted to cry and lightly slapped Nar's cheek.

「……eh」

「Do not……make us worry. Everyone will be sad if you get hurt.」

Nar knew what he could and couldn't do, but he couldn't differentiate between what was right and what was wrong. It wasn't just because Nar was still three years old, but also because there was no adult to teach him about that.

Chako and Noi who had their hands full with making a living also couldn't teach him. That was why Elena hugged Nar's small body with all her strength in order to convey that to him.

「I am really glad that you are safe……. Also, thank you. You are really a wonderful boy.」

「Nee-chan……sorry」

She didn't know whether Nar really understood or not. Even so Nar seemed to feel something and burst into tears as he hugged her. And then he fell asleep from relieve.

.

「……Lena. We should go back.」

「Yes. Thank you for waiting.」

After defeating the caterpillars, Ron was waiting until Nar calmed down. Elena smiled at him because of that, but Ron slightly pressed his lips together and averted his gaze.

「……No, it was nothing big.」

「Yes……」

Elena's smile deepened a little bit more seeing Ron like that.

They only needed to return now. Like that the two started to return back through the path they came from, but the residents from before stood up there to block their way.

「……What do you want?」

Ron stepped forward to put the two behind him while his hand hovered over his sword's handle. The residents were feeling pressured and back away, even so the middle-aged man from before stepped forward from among them.

「Y-you two're strong right? Kill the monsters around here for us」

「Monster're starting to show up at the town too!」

「We ran away from the town here, and yet monsters're also here-」

「If you guys're strong then kill them!」

The slightly dirty residents were rattling on with looks of desperation.

「……You guys」

They could kill a single monster by surrounding it and beating it up, but they had no courage to face more than one monster. That was why they were used to run away even if they had to use a kid as bait, and this time they were demanding "responsibility" from the strong using the "logic" of the weak. Ron unconsciously clenched his fist in anger seeing that.

But──.

「Wait Ron.」

「Lena……?」

For some reason Ron felt a chill hearing that tone and turned around. There the smiling Elena handed the sleeping Nar to him before stepping forward.

「Why do we have to do as all of you demand?」

Elena spoke not with her usual polite way of speaking but with wording that matched the other side. Ron wasn't the only one who sensed her atmosphere. The residents also felt it and slightly held their breath.

「You can just defeat the monsters on your own right?」

「W-we aren't strong-, so it can't be helped! You guys can say that just because you're strong! That brat too ain't your own kid right? Then help us out rather than that brat!」

「No way.」

The air froze instantly from Elena's swift reply.

「This child pondered what he can possibly do for his friends and my sake, then he put in effort to do that. Why do you think we will be able to forgive you guys after getting in the way of that?」

She was speaking indifferently without any emotion in her tone. But that was exactly why there was also emotion that could be conveyed in that way.

She would protect her people as their king. But, she would have no mercy against the enemy. The residents fell silent when they felt the chilling will inside her words. Elena smiled sweetly toward them.

「To whom Cutlass belong to? It's the town where all of you lived right? What are all of you doing abandoning it like this? Isn't it……your home?」

「T-that's……we……」

The man's eyes wavered in bewilderment. He hated this town where just living in it was painful. He wanted to run away from this kind of place one day.

But, the word [home] that was said by this smiling girl made him felt something hot that he had almost forgotten at the bottom of his heart.

.

「It's troubling that you're telling them that.」

「Tsu!?」

Ron and Elena turned around toward the voice that suddenly interrupted them.

They looked up and saw a man whose face was hidden by the hood of his cloak, looking down on them from on top of a rock. They could see under the hood from below, but his face was covered by the backlight. But, they felt that he was smiling even though they couldn't see his face.

「……And who might you be?」

「A Melsenian girl……are you the girl who's called [Rose], or her friend? I was told that if there's someone like that then they'll be a bother so go crush them……. I thought that I pulled the short end of the stick but……to think that there's really someone like that here.」

「……」

The man seemed to be someone talkative, or perhaps he thought that he had the upper hand here. He only said what he wanted to say with sadistic feeling that they could slightly sense. Then several more Cruz people appeared from behind him.

「Oi, mister. Don't talk too much……」

「It's fine. The young miss there must also want to at least know the reason why she die right?」

All of them were rank 2 and above. Elena couldn't really appraise the man because of the cloak, but her experience in the dungeon and everything else until now was telling her that this hooded man was around rank 3.

If she believed what they said, something was going on in the town or it would happen in the near future. Also they appeared here not for capturing them, but to kill them right away.

This unexpected situation made Elena and Ron started calculating whether they could win with just the two of them.

Their chance to win would go down drastically if a melee broke out. Ron should be able to use sorcery too but, he couldn't use sorcery that could defeat all of these people in one attack.

With Elena's skill, lightning spell would disperse and weaken from this range. Her only choice was to use ice spell to defeat them with one attack, but there was a risk that they would dodge from this range.

(Isn't there something……any opening that I can use)

It was also possible to use Ron's sorcery to hold them back, but she also couldn't possibly give him that instruction by speaking. And they also weren't that close that Elena would be able to convey her thought to him wordlessly.

But it was then──.

Hyun!

「Hm……gah!?」

The hooded man raised his face when he heard the sound of something cutting through the air. In that moment a small arrow pierced his right eye.

「──Ice Lance──」

In that instant Elena constructed her Ice Lance and fired it. it pierced the man's heart and the face of a dark elf was exposed from under the hood as his body rolled down the rocky place.

「Wha……」

The man's companions speechlessly looked around, but Elena was the only one who turned toward the right direction and saw the girl who was aiming a small crossbow while looking out of breath. Her hair was dyed like burning ashen iron. She appeared on top of a rocky place from the opposite side.

.

「Did I make you wait?」

「No, your timing were impeccable, Aria.」

The Master of the Ancient Ruins

「Chako-neechan……. Is everyone, okay……」

「They're surely okay.」

The dwarf Rana clasped the hand of the cat beastman Chako anxiously. The dark elf Noi was looking like he was going to cry, even so he glared at the outside firmly as the only boy present.

The youngest kid the dog beastman Nar went outside along and didn't come back. Everyone was all worried for Nar and wanted to go look for him, even so the three kids remaining here were aware that waiting home was also an important role.

Because that was what they were taught by Ron and Lena who went out searching……and also by Aria who returned after that.

(……Aria-san)

Chako was slightly scared of Aria. She had cured Noi's sickness and risked her life to save Chako from Munza Gang. But even knowing that, when she stood in front of the girl who she knew was living in a way that was even harsher than that of adult, she would shrink into herself wondering if she would get scolded for being so powerless.

Aria was harsh to herself and also to other people……surely she was a person who was kinder than anyone else.

She was a person who could risk her own life for someone else.

It was because Aria was like that, Chako was scared to tell her that Lena went outside to search for Nar.

Lena was the person who Aria wanted to protect the most. She was also feeling concern for Chako and the other children, but it was Lena who occupied the deepest place inside Aria.

Aria and Lena had no duty to protect Chako and the other children. Lena chose to save Nar because she had set her sight on a bigger world that Chako couldn't see, but how would Aria feel seeing Lena who she wanted to protect the most taking such dangerous action?

Would Aria get angry with Lena?

Would Aria become disillusioned with Chako and the others for dragging them into danger?

When she told Aria about why Lena wasn't here, Aria silently listened to her words before calmly nodding.

Chako considered Aria's feeling and wondered whether she had to tell something to Aria. She then mustered her courage and when she was about to speak up, Aria suddenly put her hand on Chako's head and gently patted her.

──Leave it to me──.

It was immeasurable just how much that short sentence managed to calm down Chako and the others.

Her words were that powerful to make them felt like that. Aria understood that even just believing in friend and waiting for them to come back was scary.

Aria should be wishing to rush off to Lena's side as soon as possible, and yet she took the time to pat the head of Chako and the anxious children first.

Chako thought that perhaps she ought to at least say something about Lena, even if just a word to Aria who was like that. She tried to raise her voice, but she saw it just for an instant within the light……Aria's face seen from

the side was slightly smiling as she headed outside. Chako felt the bond between the two and swallowed back her word.

「Aria-san……I leave everyone in your hand.」

***

When I returned to the tower, I heard the story from Chako and rushed out to the desert again.

I might be wrong because this was the doing of a child, but if Nar was looking for red grass to be used in alchemy, I had several ideas of the place where a kid might be able to reach.

Around an hour had passed since Elena and Ron left the tower. There should be no monster in this area that was beyond their ability to defeat, but the stampede's influence drove the monsters to drift out from the ruins, so we couldn't let our guard down.

Besides, there were also suspicious groups moving around, just like the dark elves and Cruz people who I saw at the town. Their motive was unclear but it mustn't be anything good.

I drank the mana recovery potion that I created and restored my mana capacity that had decreased until now. At the same time I used body strengthening to sprint through the desert.

If the two were moving while searching for Nar, they shouldn't have gone that far. I was running with triple the speed of the average person while directing mana into my eyes too. I focused on the flow of mana flowing in the air and faintly saw the water and darkness magic particles. They came from monster corpses, so I was convinced that something was going on in this direction.

If the two headed to a place where a lot of red grass grew, they would need to take a detour going around a rocky place. But I had no business with the safe route.

「──Iron Rose──」

After I whispered that name, my pink hair changed color to ashen iron color that was like burning ash. The light residues that my hair scattered form a trail behind me like a comet. The flowing scenery that entered my eyes accelerated up.

I took a deep breath and ignored the safe route. In order to speed up even more, I assigned the rose's body strengthening to focus in speed.

「A Quick Re-!」

Because mana recovery potion disturbed the flow of mana, I was unable to finely control Iron Rose, but that rough control was enough if it was just for moving fast.

My body sped up even more and ran up the rocky wall even faster than a rock falling from cliff. An earthworm-like monster attacked me midway and I slashed it while passing through.

「Tsu!」

My strengthened search skill caught Elena's presence at far away.

At the same time I also sensed multiple presences. A faint killing intent……. And then I felt gathering mana in Elena's presence. I quickly switched my awareness for "combat".

I couldn't use throwing knife in my condition where fine control was impossible. I took out a small crossbow from my Storage and loaded it with steel arrow while leaping up on a rocky place. In less than a second my sight caught a hooded man who seemed to be a dark elf and judged him as enemy. I l fired my crossbow.

The arrow that I aimed toward the center of his face pierced the dark elf's right eye. In that instant, Elena's carefully aimed ice spear stabbed the man's chest.

.

「Did I make you wait?」

「No, your timing were impeccable, Aria.」

.

Elena smiled even while letting out a relieved sigh.

It seemed that I barely made it in time. Ron's eyes widened seeing my sudden appearance. From how Nar and Ron looked, they didn't seem to be seriously injured. I turned my eyes toward the remaining Cruzian men after seeing that.

「M-mister-!?」

「W-what happened!?」

「Someone's on the cliff there!」

The Cruzian men started making a ruckus and one of them yelled while drawing his bow. Seeing that equipment I judged that they were the same like the groups I saw in the town.

The man fired his arrow. There were also someone else who tried to do the same, but arrow wouldn't work against warrior rank 4 and above. As long as I didn't let my guard down, I could dodge something like arrow even after it was fired.

「He flew!?」

Without even running beforehand, I jumped more than ten meters to the other side using only body strengthening. I didn't need Iron Rose anymore. The cloak that I threw away midair and the light residue acted as bait while I dodged the arrow. I landed in front of them while slashing the throats of two men who tried to switch weapon to bow.

「What the hell-!?」

「K-kill!」

「W-woman!?」

The remaining three──a Cruzian man in his forty and two Cruzian men in their twenty. The man in his twenty was the slowest one to pull out his weapon. The throwing knife that I pulled out and threw behind my fluttering skirt was planted between his eyes.

「Aria-」

「Roger」

I heard Elena's voice. I knew. I also had something to ask from them.

I stepped forward while fixing my grip on my black knife and dagger. The man who yelled first took a step back to look for a way to escape, while the other man was trembling in anger after his comrades were killed. He then attacked with his spear.

「That man over there then.」

「Gugah」

It would take time to interrogate someone who held strong feeling for his comrade. I pushed away the speartip that was thrusting at me and cut the man's carotid artery while passing him by. I slipped through before blood could spurt out from the cut and approached the other man. The last remaining man threw his spear toward me while easily turning his back at me.

「Gua!?」

My weight type pendulum struck the back of his head. The impact made the man tripped and fell on the ground. I caught the man's spear from the air and thrust it toward his neck.

「If you want to live then can you tell us everything that you know?」

***

「DOURYAA!!」

Jesha's two-handed axe split apart the head of an ogre.

「Men! Show me your grit!!」

The adventurers under Jesha's command had finished cleaning up the first wave of stampede that consisted of the quick-footed monsters. A lot of the monsters were low-ranked so there was no one who got seriously injured.

But, the second wave had sand ogres that were characteristic of this region mixed in. So people other than the shield bearers also started to get injured from the clash against the rank 4 monster.

「You guys too, give me a little more space!」

「We're young miss's bodyguard y'know? Don't ask for something impossible!」

「Jilgan-san'll murder us if we left young miss alone!」

The dwarves who had been Jesha's long time subordinates replied to her yell with a laugh.

Sand ogre had the combat strength of lower rank 4, and there were also some veteran among them which would require multiple rank 3 to be dealt with.

There were also multiple rank 3 among the adventurers. Even so the injuries started piling up because the majority of the high ranked adventurers were staying around Jesha to guard her. Furthermore they were all like her chaperone Jilgan. They all had known her ever since she was little, so they prioritized Jesha's safety more than her order and would even ignore her command sometimes.

Right now the beastmen of Munza Gang were still doing hit and run so none of them had gotten seriously injured, but at this rate there would be no

guarantee that things would keep going well.

「You assholes……」

Jesha was grinding her teeth in respond to the troublesome fatherly dwarves, but the next moment she wore warlike grin.

「No helping it then! Oi, tell those scurrying beastmen, gather the ogres at the center! I'm gonna take 'em all at once!」

「「「OOOOOOOOO!!」」」

The adventurers' cheered at Jesha's roaring yell.

Four hours had passed since they fought the stampede. The number of monster they had defeated had already surpassed five hundred. Right now they also still had potions in reserve, and they had also refrained from using the high class potion they bought from "Rose" as much as possible. Normally even if a stampede occurred it would be over after they defeated a thousand monsters, but who knew if it would be the same this time.

There was a stretch of several hours between the first and second wave. During that time they could treat the injury and recover stamina and mana, but it was possible that even that wouldn't be enough depending on the composition of the third wave.

Even though Jesha was putting on a warlike expression, she was starting to feel anxious inside toward the stampede that was showing no sign of ending.

(……Tsk, I'm getting bad premonition.)

It felt like the monsters were stronger than the previous stampede. She thought that it was because the monsters were in a state of panic. The reason for that was most likely because that thing was approaching.

The objective of Jesha and her men was to subjugate it, but there was also the suspicious behavior of the human adventurers. If the next monster wave was also in the same scale then…….

(……I should have dragged “Rose” here too)

Jesha didn’t request adventurer Aria to come to face stampede was because the dwarves were the main force no matter what and also because she wanted Aria to prioritize producing potion.

But if Jesha could be honest, because she arbitrarily considered Aria as her rival as a fellow woman and fellow rank 4, asking Aria for help would be like recognizing that her strength was insufficient. She didn’t want to do that.

She understood that it was wrong of her to be like that as a guild leader, but as a mountain dwarf Jesha too was still a girl who just became of age.

「Guild master! That!」

「What, the third wave……」

A female beastman scout rushed to Jesha’s location and turned her attention toward the ruins. When she strained her sight, certainly she could see sand cloud approaching this way from the desert, but that wasn’t the reason why the female beastman looked pale.

The third wave was made up of relatively slow monsters like rock lizard or sand lizard. They had hard scales but rank-wise they weren’t strong enemy. But…….

「That’s……tsu!」

Behind them was a silhouette that was like a slow mountain, advancing forward and driving on the monsters. Then its figure appeared from the sand cloud that was hiding it from view like a veil.

Sleek scales with iridescent color with black as the base.

Four horns that were smoothly growing to the back.

Reptilian eyes with color that was a mix of gold and silver.

It was walking on four legs with its head lifted up calmly. Just the height of its head would make them needed to look up at its huge body…….

The master of the ancient ruins Resvel, the earth dragon found its new “prey” and let out a roar that shook the earth.

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『GAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!』

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▼Earth Dragon　Race：Low Ranked Dragon・Mythical Beast Rank 6

【Magic Power：３３４／３５０】【Stamina：７９２／８２０】

【Overall Combat Strength：４５５７】

Darkness On The Move

Dragon──. A race of mythical beast that had existed from even before the history of mankind. The strongest creature in this world.

It was said that their lifespan could reach several millenniums or even dozens of millenniums. One theory stated that their intellect increased along with their aging, and they wouldn't die but evolve repeatedly until they became dragon god.

As they aged and became elemental dragon, they would obtain high intellect along with the ability to fly in the sky and powerful might, but mankind's fear toward the known dragon came not from those elemental dragons but from "earth dragon" that could be said as the dragon race's immature form.

By obtaining element, dragon gradually grew to subsist on magic particle itself. But, earth dragon that still hadn't obtained element would devour all creatures as its food following its instinct. Especially humans, creature that lived in group, with weak ability to run away, and also possessed a lot of mana in their body. A dragon that had learned the taste of [human] would grow to attack human settlement often because of their low intelligence and became feared as man-eating dragon.

.

『GAAA

「Hiiih!?」

「Uaaaaaaaaah!?」

Some of the adventurers screamed so loudly as though they were going to tear their throat.

Dragon's roar brought fear for "the weak". It was also called as dragon's selection. It didn't matter what someone's rank or skill level was, a dragon's roar would send fear into [those with no determination] who didn't have the qualification to stand before a dragon.

The adventurers here had come this far knowing the possibility that they might fight dragon. However, most of them only trembled at most because of their determination, even so the youngsters who saw the dragon for the first time felt fear that they couldn't endure completely. They panicked and caused the formation to start to go out of order.

「Punch the panicking guys to make them return to their sense! If that's still no good then kill them!!」

Jesha quickly raised her voice with a vigor that wouldn't lose even against the dragon's roar.

Something that couldn't be done by a normal organization was only something normal in this land where the price of life was cheap. The veteran adventurers quickly acted and punched the panicking youths as though they were going to kill them. Their quick action kept the damage to minimum instead.

But it wasn't just the humans who panicked. The monsters lost their senses and rushed through the disturbed formation. They attacked the wounded who were at the back, causing not a little damage to the wounded and the healers.

「Tsk!」

Jesha clicked her tongue strongly even while racking her brain.

They had assumed that they dragon would come out, but it was unexpected that their formation would crumble this quickly.

Was their wall to stop the monsters lacking?

Was their treatment of the wounded who retreated to the back too slow?

They didn't have enough sorcerer who could use light sorcery and high class potion, but they should have a lot of low class potion. Then why…….

「Jilgan!! Bring me my shell dragon[ride]! We're going out!」

Jesha stopped thinking deeply in the middle of fight and sought for a breakthrough solution using her battle instinct. Then she yelled for a transport.

Jesha and Jilgan were thinking to subjugate the earth dragon personally as their last resort when the earth dragon came out. Even so, there was no way it could be defeated just by one or two rank 4 human. Therefore Jesha and the others were forming a suicide corps that consisted of only rank 4 and upper rank 3 including Jesha and Jilgan.

But, there was too much distance with the earth dragon because the frontline crumbled faster than expected. At this rate they would be baptized in the dragon's flame breath without being able to do anything. Sensing that Jesha quickly chose to charge forward riding on the shell dragon subspecies that they brought here as pack horse.

With Jesha and other warriors who were supporting the center frontline leaving, there would be a lot of damage to the adventurers fighting there. The probability of survival for the suicide corps that was heading to the earth dragon should also be low.

Even so, the adventurers who considered the desert town as their stronghold and "birthplace" tightened their grip on their weapon with a ferocious grin while trembling with excitement.

But──

DOGOOONN!!

「What happened!?」

Jilgan raised his voice in respond to the sound of explosion that came from behind.

Out of nowhere, fire broke out at the rearmost line, the line even further behind the sorcerers who were the rear guard where the carriages filled with food and medicine were placed. Arrows flew from the rear and attacked the back of the sorcerers.

Jilgan was managing the composition of each unit in Jesha's place. It seemed that there was an attack by someone from somewhere, but he should have also left behind people who could fight there.

「Don't tell me──」

Jilgan noticed something and raised his face──.

『HA-HA-HAAA!』

A laugh resounded from around the place where the explosion happened. More than ten shell dragons with people riding on them flew out from inside the flame's smoke and sand cloud.

Their number was practically the same with the number of shell dragons that they brought here to pull the carriages.

The men riding on the shell dragons skillfully fired more arrows at the rear guards. And then without stopping they all scattered to every direction to run away while one of them intentionally changed direction to approach until a distance where Jesha and Jilgan could see his face.

「You……-」

「Serves you right-, Jilgan-, guild master-! D'you think that we gonna let the dwarves and stinky beasts throw their weight around forever huh!」

That Cruzian man was considered as a veteran even in the adventurer guild and rose until rank 3 even inside the guild where it was difficult for anyone other than dwarf to reach high rank. From how humble he acted, he shouldn't have a bad relationship with dwarf or beastman. That was why he was included in the subjugation force this time but…….

「You bastard, so you worked with Riezan Family-!」

「Obviously, Jilgan! Why do you think it's reasonable for a powerful human to obey you guys? You were treating me all this time like a damn gopher, but even that's only until today──」

Gakin!!

The axe that was thrown from Jilgan's side with absurd strength attacked the man. There should be a lot of distance between them, and yet the man quickly deflected it with his shield.

「……You're a woman with wandering hand huh, guild master!!」

「You bastard, what's your aim!? Do you think you'll be able to keep living in the town after doing something like this!?」

Jesha who was the one throwing the hand axe howled. The man tossed away his half destroyed shield while getting cold sweat inside his heart, even so he put on a twisted smirk.

「I'm telling you that today is the end-! From now on it's us, Riezan Family that's in control of that town! Look at that damn thing-!」

The man chanted something and fired up the darkness that his hand produced. It was the dark sorcery Noise which created a high-pitched sound like a flute that reverberated through the desert.

『GUOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!』

The earth dragon responded to that sound and stopped walking. It then roared toward the sky.

And then from the sand cloud behind it, people clad in jet black garment riding on huge earth lizards appeared. Standing at the front was a man wearing black armor who raised his jet black spear toward the sky.

「Evil race army-!?」

Jesha raised her voice in shock. Before everyone there could understand the meaning of her words, the evil army's knight pointed the tip of his raised spear toward the adventurers──.

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『──────!!』

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With that as the signal, the earth dragon opened its jaw and turned the desert into scorching heat with a giant fire ball.

「UOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!」

Jesha screamed inside the flame.

She heard the screams of the adventurers. The comrades who she had talked with, ate food together, and adventured together were falling inside the flame.

This was dragon──the strongest existence in this world.

The elite adventurers were vanishing inside the flame with just that single breath.

「RUNNNNNNNNNNNNNNN!!」

Even so there were still survivors. Jesha screamed as though to tear her throat telling the survivors to run away. But…….

Hyun……! Hyun-, hyun-!

「Wha-!?」

The crossbows that the evil race army fired hummed. Their arrows were killing the survivors one after another.

「STOPPPPPPPPPP!」

Hyun-!

Huge arrow was also fired at the screaming Jesha…….

「GUOOOOOOOOOO!」

「Jilgan!」

Jilgan became Jesha's shield and that arrow pierced his stomach.

「Jesha! Retreat for now-!」

Jilgan also protected Jesha from the dragon's breath and got half his body burned. He yelled at her reproachfully. He was receiving the spears that were thrown by the evil race army that had approached near, even so he pulled out the spears and threw them back, killing the evil race soldiers.

「……Eat……shit」

「Jilgan……tsu, Jilgan!」

Jilgan fell on the scorched sand and his blood scattered. Jesha who caught his body realized that his life had run out. She gritted her teeth as though baring her fang and grabbed Jilgan's halberd as she stood up.

「I……still haven't lost yet-! Come, evil race bastards!!」

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「It's really the evil race.」

Elena and Ron gulped after listening to the testimony of the last remaining man.

The evil race army's invasion. That was the cause of the dark elves' disappearance from that town, and it was also a cause of why this Cruzian man……Riezan Family took action.

「H-hey? I already told you everything so I can go now right? Right?」

The man who was in his forty was still lying on his backside after getting hit on the back of his head. He was looking up at me with a gaze that asked for pity.

「Not yet. What's Riezan Family's objective? Why are you guys together with dark elves? What's the point of the evil army's invasion?」

I held the spear's tip unwaveringly on the man's throat with just my left arm. The man let out a crafty expression for an instant as though he wanted to click his tongue. The smile he was wearing twisted.

「D-don't be hasty okay-, we were going to attack all the organizations at the same time with the evil race army's invasion. I myself don't know everything but, the top had already negotiated with the evil race army since long time ago, and after those evil race guys take the town, they would leave the control of the city to us, that's the promise-, see, I already told you everything!」

「And what's the evil race army's objective?」

This kind of man was no different than a swindler. He only said what he himself wanted to say and tried to twist the truth.

「T-that's……」

The man hesitated to say when I pressed him. There was no way that the evil race who was hostile against human race moved their army just to expand their sphere of influence. Most likely…….

「……They'll use the town as military base to invade Carlfan Empire huh.」

「──tsu!」

Ron suddenly said those words from the side. The man's eyes widened and he turned toward Ron.

Yes, that was the possibility with highest chance. The dark elves in that town had vanished except for those who were born in that town. And most likely those dark elves who vanished were helping with the demand from their birthplace the evil race country.

Even so if they had lived in that town for a long time, they should also have made some acquaintances from other races. If they abandoned those bonds and cooperated with the evil race army, it would be natural to think that the evil race had a big reason for mobilizing their army. Looking underneath, it wouldn't just Riezan Family becoming the new ruler of the town, it was also possible that everyone who opposed them would be killed. That was exactly why this man hesitated to answer.

「……That silence, I'll take it as yes.」

「W-wait a second-」

Ron pulled out his sword with an angry face that he had never shown until now. He stabbed the man's heart from as he tried to run away. Elena was watching that happening with a sorrowful expression.

「Ron……」

「I'm sorry, I……」

「……」

Ron too must have done that spontaneously. I didn't know whether that anger was merely patriotism, but perhaps Elena understood why he did such thing. She didn't say whether what he had done was a good or a bad thing

and gently touched Ron's hand that was holding the bloody sword to make him lower it.

「U-umm……, what should we do……」

The Cruzian people nearby talked to us with a scared expression.

Were they people living in this area? I didn't feel any hostility from them, but when I turned my gaze to Elena to ask what was the situation here, she slightly nodded at me before turning toward them.

「We can't do anything. After all there is nothing that we can possibly do to face an army. If you people stay here, then there should not be any greater danger befalling you.」

「Tha-……that's true but, if the town get done in……」

Elena's eyes became slightly colder again at the man's indecisive attitude. He was leaving everything to others, hoping that someone else would do something to fix the situation and only talked without doing anything himself.

「If you simply wish to survive then it does not matter correct? All of you can live as you please. After all this place is your "birthplace".」

If it was just to survive then there was way to manage somehow even in this harsh desert. They were adults with strength in their body, not young orphan. They could live anywhere by defeating monster and eating succulent plant.

That was their difference from us who had objective and couldn't act freely.

「I……」

The man at the forefront showed an agonized expression in respond to Elena's words. And then he lifted up his face as though he had made his decision.

「Yeah……this is our birthplace. It's a shitty land, even so I still have acquaintances here. It's impossible for me to fight but, I can at least tell those guys to run away……」

「Is that so? I will not stop you from doing that. However……please, take care of yourself.」

「Y-yeah」

After Elena said so, the man started running to somewhere. The other people also showed a little hesitation, even so they came to their own understanding and chased after the man.

.

「……Lena, Aria. Can I leave Nar to you?」

Ron who was watching that happening sheathed his sword and lifted up Nar who was laid down on the ground while saying such thing.

「I do not mind but……what are you going to do Ron?」

「I'm……going to search Kamil.」

Ron replied to Elena's words with a serious face and gaze.

「What about Kamil? He should have returned to the base earlier than me.」

「He hasn't returned.」

I filled my words with a bit of implication. In respond Ron shook his head and frowned a little.

「But believe me-. Kamil is certainly not a person from this town, but he isn't involved with the evil race army's invasion-. Rather……」

Ron seemed to know about Kamil's background, even so he only spoke vaguely and didn't continue further. Elena shook her head a little.

「We too does not think that Kamil is connected with the evil race army despite being a dark elf. But Ron, do you know where he is right now?」

「Y-yeah, sorry. I also asked him to buy fire element magic stone. This is just my guess but, I think he's at the town, at the place of this one merchant who can be trusted.」

Certainly even though Kamil was trustworthy as an individual, there was a part of his background that was suspicious. I too didn't think that he was connected with the evil race army just based on that, but I also couldn't declare that he was completely uninvolved.

And if Kamil really headed to the town, there was also a possibility of him getting mistaken as a part of the evil race and getting attacked by the townspeople.

Ron must be worried for Kamil as a friend, because with his knowledge of Kamil's true identity, he judged that there was a high possibility that he would get dragged into the incident this time.

「Ron, do we still not have enough fire element magic stone?」

「No, we've enough……just barely. If it's just to travel until the edge of Carlfan Empire then our current stock should last.」

「Then you go prepare the hot-air balloon Ron. After all the evil race army will definitely take it away if they find it.」

「I know that……but」

As a friend he must wished to go search for Kamil himself. I understood his feeling but, the optimal solution could be seen if he considered our objective.

「I'll go to the town. Ron and Lena, you two prioritize preparing for the escape.」

「Aria……」

Even if Ron went, I was unsure if he would be able to come back with his strength. It would be just as dangerous even if I'm the one going, even so I was used to a situation where everything was enemy.

I didn't know whether saving Kamil would be the correct choice, even so I also trusted him enough. I didn't mind saving someone like him who was making every effort to save children.

Ron was speechless seeing me dispassionately deciding to leap into danger alone. Elena approached me with eyes that were moistening just a little, then she pressed her forehead on my shoulder with strength so small that I almost couldn't feel it.

「Again……you go alone」

「The same like you Lena. If it's something that can be protected then it's better to protect it. I'll definitely return, so will you believe in me?」

After I said that, Elena pulled back her face from my shoulder and she looked up closely at me who was slightly higher than her.

「More than anyone else in this world……」

「Yeah.」

Elena made a conflicted smile that looked worried as she stepped away from me who decided to head to the town alone. Seeing us like that, Ron looked straight at me with determination filling his eyes.

「……I'm sorry that I can't tell you everything. But, I ask you to leave everyone to me. For trusting Kamil and me, I swear on this name……I swear on my name as Carlfan Empire's third prince, Lawrence Carlfan, that I will protect everyone. Aria……I'll leave Kamil to you.」

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「General Aishe-, we got a report from the detached force that the isolation of those adventurers succeeded-」

The dark elf woman who was called as general nodded silently at her subordinate's words. Her armor made some sounds as she stood up.

The sorcerer corpse had some monster users among them who drew away the adventurers from the town. The beastmen who were troublesome inside the town also got one of their elders killed and their chain of command hadn't been restored.

Aishe was tall for a female elf. Her well-trained body that had scars from blade was covered with black leather garment that left her chest area opened. Her long silver hair fluttered as she looked domineeringly at her lined up subordinates with golden eyes. She raised her favorite great sword high above her toward them.

「The evil general Aishe commands-! All troops, depart-!!」

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And then──.

The army wearing black armor marched through the desert. There was a hooded figure looking down on that sight from a sand dune.

Under the strong desert sunlight, that figure was wearing a thick hooded cloak that covered the whole body. Even so there was white smoke drifting from that figure as though something was burning. An insane laugh burst out from under the hood.

There was already a plan from the start, but it was going nowhere. This figure gave threw their backing behind that plan, used even her body to win over the neutral faction, and even personally headed to the scene with their body that couldn't go out under the sun to forcefully move things forward.

Everything was for the sake of taking revenge for their friend.

Everything was because of their grudge against mankind.

The girl who was the head of the vampire clan stared at the moving army even while feeling the pain of her body burning even under the cloak that

was blocking the desert's sunlight. She raised her voice.

「They finally moved……it's "war"! Thousand curses for mankind!!」

Burning Town

「The main force has moved. We'll start our part now.」

「「「Ooooooo!」」」

At various places in the desert town Cutlass, the Cruzian people of Riezan Family responded to the words of the dark elves who hid their face under the hood with war cry.

The "dark elves" in this town were divided into two kinds.

One was the people who were born in this town or desert and their mentality wasn't that different from forest elf.

The other dark elves were people who originated from the evil race country. Even if they were away from their country, they considered themselves as proud [evil race] from the evil race country.

The dark elves were stamped as "evil" by the [holy church] that crossed the ocean to arrive in this Thurs Continent in the past. They were persecuted and driven out from their bountiful land. Because they couldn't forget that history, the dark elves used the disparaging term [evil race] to introduce themselves and went into war many times against the countries and the people that adopted the teaching of the holy church.

The majority of evil race people were still soldier of the evil race army even if they left to other country. Even if they had migrated to this town, formed friendship with human and poured drink for each other, shared happiness and laughed together, their hand would lift up their blade as a "soldier" if the evil race country ordered them to.

The Cruzian people of Reizan Family couldn't comprehend that.

Riezan Family's objective was to grasp the control over this town. They brought in the evil race as mercenary and whittled down the other faction's power. They believed that there was no one who wouldn't move for money, even if it was the evil race. They didn't understand the true nature of the evil race.

The evil race army's objective was to make this town into a military base as foothold to invade Carlfan Empire. Riezan Family was also aware of that, but they never received any higher education like politic and fell under the impression that the evil race would just make a base here.

The evil race made use of that misunderstanding and formed an empty agreement with Riezan Family. The evil race was using them to lockdown the town. And then the evil race gave Riezan Family some evil race weapons and men and instigated them to attack the town and the bases of the other three organizations, claiming that it was necessary for their objective.

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(Fools, all of them……)

One dark elf scoffed seeing the smoke rising up from the town far away.

The dark elves in this town were taking command in the attack to the town, but several military officers of the evil race army were mixed among them for negotiating with Riezan Family too. One of them Giba was a rank 3 sorcerer. He took position at one of the main road at the wall surrounding the town along with the men of Riezan Family. There they were attacking the caravans and townspeople who tried to escape.

But even that only lasted until the main force of evil race army arrived. Giba's role was to secure the path for the main force to enter into the town.

Riezan Family was under the impression that the evil race army would eliminate their enemies inside the town for them, but in actuality when the main force arrived, the armed Riezan Family would also become nuisance to them, just like the other organizations.

「Oi, you think you can run away from heree?」

「S-sto──」

The men of Riezan Family attacked a caravan that tried to run away. The blood of the adventurers guarding the caravan who were cut down was scattered around and absorbed by the dry ground.

They were blockading the town so that no information would leak out to Carlfan Empire.

Even if they turned this place into frontline base, there was a risk that Carlfan Empire would counterattack before they could put their force in order. This caravan and adventurers were also people of Carlfan Empire, so the evil race army couldn't allow them to escape.

Riezan Family too was taking the initiative to loot the town to fill their pocket. Furthermore Riezan Family that was controlling the red light district wasn't satisfied with just that. They were starting to search and kidnap good looking young women.

The townspeople who had lived in this harsh desert area also weren't exactly helpless, but there was no way they could contend against fully armed rank 2 and 3 warriors. The townspeople who tried to escape from the town had their private belonging and family snatched away from them. Those who fought back had their life taken away mercilessly too.

「A-at least spare the children……tsu」

「Nn~? What should we do boss-!」

A young mother was begging for mercy while hugging her crying baby tightly. Young human could also be used as slave labor, but the baby would be just in the way. The man of Riezan Family asked Giba for order. Giba looked down at the mother and child with annoyance and spat out his words coldly.

「A nuisance. Kill anyone that can't work.」

「Hehe, that's the breaks. You got no luck.」

「N-no way……」

The mother fell into despair. The man lifted up his single-edged blade.

A proper army would never do anything like this. But the people here were the men of Reizan Family who were nastier than even a lowly mercenary. Giba too had no sympathy to give to people who would die soon, he had no interest at all outside that.

「Shut up that urchin alrea──」

The man tried to tear away the baby from the mother forcefully. It was then──.

「……Oi, what's that?」

Someone muttered such question.

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The sunlight that was blazing down on the desert warped the air and made the desert looked blurry. A single silhouette was sprinting through it.

The cloak the person was wearing was flapping like the wings of a strange bird. Just how fast one had to sprint to make it flap like that? The silhouette was approaching this way before their eyes. The unrealistic sight made the watchers wanted to doubt their eyes for a moment.

The dumbfounded men came back to their senses from the sensation of trickling sweat on their forehead. But, that shadow had already closed the distance greatly and slashed the neck of a man with a black blade before he could lift up his spear.

「……Ha?」

There was almost nobody who could even make such short voice.

A lot of blood spurted out from their comrade who suddenly got his neck cut. The majority of the men there couldn't even understand right away what just happened. Only those who could barely understand that "they couldn't understand" could make a voice. The moment they could understand that it was "enemy", the five men at the perimeter were spilling out blood while collapsing after the spear user.

「Enemy attackkkkk!!」

Giba returned to his senses before others could and raised his voice with a bit of quavering in his tone.

The men of Riezan Family hurriedly readied their weapon. Giba too started to chant his specialty fire sorcery. But before he could cast it, the shadow cut its way to the middle of the men with terrifying speed.

『──!?』

A flash──it was too fast that he even hallucinated that the space was distorting.

The shadow's cloak was flapping so energetically that it didn't seem suitable to be worn for fighting, but it concealed the figure underneath it. It invoked instinctual fear inside him that made him questioned whether that "enemy" was really human.

「Gugah!?」

Fear caused their legs to stop and their movement to dull. The black blade was swung at that moment of weakness. Every time the jet black sword flashed, the men who were trying to use their weapon got their eye or forehead stabbed, or their throat torn up, losing their life.

「Yaaaaaaaaaaa!!」

「Dieee!! Fire Javelin──!」

The men finally came to their senses at that point and swung their axe, thrust their spear, and fired flame spear that would even hit their own allies.

They thought that no matter how inhuman that “enemy” was, they would definitely lose their life against these many attacks.

「──tsu!」

But, that “enemy” made decision in an instant and stepped on a spear to jump to the air, then a shield of light deflected the flame spear. It didn’t stop there, there was sound of something slicing through wind at the surrounding of the “enemy”. The men around got their skull smashed, their throat pierced, and their artery torn apart. They were sinking into a sea of blood in the blink of eye.

「Gah……」

The sight was so out of reality that Giba’s movement stopped for a moment, when a throwing knife pierced between his eyes. As his sight was getting enveloped by darkness, the radiance of “blonde hair tinged with pink” that he caught a glimpse of for just an instant was burned into his eyes until his life vanished.

It was less than a minute──that girl annihilated the dark elf and Riezan Family’s men in just that much time since she appeared. She pulled out the knife from Giba’s head before turning toward the people who were in a silent daze because of how shocking the spectacle was. There wasn’t any chance in her expression.

「The evil race army is coming. Run or return……decide by yourself how you guys are going to “live”.」

***

The town was enveloped in a strange atmosphere. The dark elves and Riezan Family’s main force that I happened to see that time had finally moved.

The townspeople who lived in this desert also weren’t weak. But, the evil race was attacking the base of each organization that was controlling the

people, and they were also setting fire all over the town to foster even more chaos.

Building that was made from stone wouldn't collapse even if it was set in fire, but the town was using a lot of cloth or grass fiber as door or blind. Those things catching fire caused people to be scared and the people involved with each organization were attacked by taking advantage of that confusion.

「……」

I couldn't do much about this chaos. After all war wasn't something that could be stopped by an individual, nor should it be so.

Even so…….

「You're in the way.」

「Gah!?」

I lightly clicked my heel while running on the street. Using the blade that snapped out, I kicked the face of a man who seemed to be a member of Riezan Family attacking the residents.

「Y-you bastard──」

A nearby dark elf turned around. I crushed his skull with my weighted pendulum.

What reason was there for me to overlook you guys?

.

I avoided the street where people were running around and sprinted on top of the stalls that weren't burning. I attacked the men of Riezan Family who I saw on my way using all-purpose type and slashing type pendulums.

One man who noticed that pointed his spear at me who was on a stall, but I entangled the tip with my cloak's bottom and took the spear away from

him, then I pierced his heart using that stolen spear.

I didn't have spearmanship skill but, that didn't mean I couldn't use spear at all when I had martial art and other close range combat skills. But, I didn't know whether I would be able to replenish my weapon from here on, so I tried to kill my enemies using weapon I stole from them as much as possible.

I jumped from above a stall to a roof and tossed away the short sword and spear I stole. I used the bow and arrows that I picked up midway and shot the head of a dark elf chanting his sorcery at the other side of the street.

I had also gotten attacked several times, but I still hadn't gotten any injury that needed Heal or Cure to treat when I arrived at one of my destinations.

There was a small shop inside an alley. In this situation it was highly possible that the owner had locked themselves inside or ran away, but when I pushed aside the cloth that was hanged up as a door and entered inside, a Cruzian old man with pure white beard who seemed to be the shop owner was there leisurely smoking using something like a smoking pipe.

「……Are you shopping at this kind of time? Or perhaps you're a thief, young miss?」

「You too, are you still opening your shop at this kind of time? I heard that a dark elf called Kamil ordered fire element magic stone here. Has he come here?」

Even my cloak had gotten dirty with blood and soot from the battles on my way here. It couldn't be helped even if he thought of me as a thief. Even so when I mentioned Kamil's name, the old man lightly raised an eyebrow while waving his smoking pipe.

「……Miss, are you that boy's friend? Sorry but I haven't seen him for several days. ……Also, if you're a woman then it's better that you run away too miss.」

「You say that but aren't you going to run away too?」

「The dark elves and Riezan Family bunch are scheming something right? At this point an old man like me won't know how to live even if I run away to outside.」

「I see……」

I couldn't tell someone who had resolved himself to run away.

This was how this world worked. If you don't have the freedom to live, at the very least you mustn't allow your freedom to die to be taken away.

It was only his pride that was beyond anyone's ability to violate. I bowed my head to him at the end before leaving, but the old man called out to me for some reason.

「Wait, miss. Bring this with you.」

「This is……」

The old man handed me a large magic stone that was wrapped in oil paper.

「It's the thing that boy ordered. You need it right? It'll just get stolen anyway even if I keep it here. I also already got paid so don't worry.」

The old man stopped talking at that point and suddenly stared straight into my eyes under the hood.

「……Miss, you aren't someone from this town right? Perhaps you want to do something seeing this town getting attacked by that dangerous bunch but, you don't need to feel anything like that.」

The old man blew out smoke from his mouth and focused his eyes at the far away.

「This town is our town. We who are born and will die in this town already made our resolve. Miss, you don't need to bother about us and can just do as you like. Don't you have more important thing to do rather than worrying about this town?」

「……」

What did this old man saw in me that he said something like that to me…….

I wonder what was the important thing for me? I don't really know right now but, I thanked his concern to me and bowed my head deeply once more before leaving the shop.

.

Kamil wasn't here. I would go to another place where I thought he might be. If he also wasn't there then I wouldn't search for him anymore.

Should I search for Kamil until I found him, or gave up at some point to return to Elena and others?

If possible I wanted everyone to survive including Kamil. Was I wishing like that because I too considered them as comrades?

Important thing. Not my priority as adventurer, but the true "wish" of "me" myself, what could it be…….

I started running through the town again. I told the people I passed by that the evil race army was coming while heading toward my last destination.

Most likely that place was dangerous right now. I rushed through the town that was on fire and headed there. That place, the adventurer guild was burning and under attack of Riezan Family.

Looks like the guild couldn't last with its main force absent. I saw the dark elf and Cruzian people surrounding the guild and instantly switched mentality for battle.

「──Illusion──」

Instantly, the flame burning the adventurer guild swelled up greatly and enveloped the attackers.

「「「――!?」」」

The illusion that also gave off the feeling of heat pushed the men of Riezan Family into panic and they ran about trying to escape. At the same time I rushed forward to kill the men who let their guard down, but real flame instead of illusion suddenly swallowed the Cruzian people along with me.

I quickly jumped back and sacrificed my cloak to evade the flame. Then a dark elf appeared from the other side of my vanishing illusion.

「……Melsenian woman. Are you an adventurer too?」

He was a dark elf who looked like a young ma in his twenty. But, the black armor he was wearing and his presence were at different level compared to the other dark elves I had seen until now.

「……Evil race army's soldier huh.」

「Hoo……you seem different than the other adventurers. This place is disappointing with how weak its resistance was after all the veterans were lured outside but……looks like I'll be able to have a good fight with this.」

The young man started walking while still empty handed. He kept putting on a daring smile while powerful mana was filling up both his arms.

.

▼Young Man From Evil Race Army　Race：Dark Elf♂・Rank 4

【Magic Power：２６１／３１５】【Stamina：２１５／２１５】

【Overall Combat Strength：１１０８（Sorcery Attack Power：１３３０）】

.

A rank 4 sorcerer……furthermore this aura, he was the same like Carla and Samantha who could use sorcery even at close range, a "magician" who had learned martial art.

Most likely he was dispatched from the evil race army to supervise the dark elves in this town.

He seemed to be very confident of himself. He burned Riezan Family's men who were his allies to death, found joy in battle, and didn't show any sign of retreating at all even after seeing my combat strength.

「……」

「You won't come? I'll teach you that combat strength isn't everything in battle. My name is Grohl. I'll have you show me your strength!」

GROOOOOOOOOO!

The evil race soldier Grohl unleashed Fire Breath completely chantless without even using the activation word. It dyed the surrounding crimson. The sorcery's strength wouldn't go up like that, but he must be confident that he could deal lethal wound even with that because it was a rank 4 sorcery.

「──Shield──」

I had predicted this from the magic particle's color and mana amount and used Shield to divert the flame while using my martial art to dodge.

「A human is using that "shield"-!?」

Grohl was raising his voice in delight even though his sorcery was dodged.

I was dodging while throwing a scorched short sword that I picked up from the ground toward the young man. But he intentionally slapped it away using his iron gauntlet, then he closed the distance and unleashed a kick that clashed against my own kick.

「Not bad! Then how about this!」

In that moment, nearly ten Fire Arros appeared around him. It was chantless again and they were fired immediately after appearing.

This time I also didn’t use shield and dodged using only martial art and obstacles. Some grazed me but just that much didn’t damage me greatly.

「You aren’t calling your friends here? You come here because of evil race army’s order right?」

「We the evil race respect the strong. Even our fellow evil race is nothing but a bother if they’re just small fry. Do you think there’s anything with higher priority than fighting you in this place?」

「……I see.」

So this was what it looked like to not have something important.

Human no matter who was living while harboring wish. Other people couldn’t measure the value of that, even so there was the minimum thing that had to be protected no matter what.

Wish and desire were similar, but they were fundamentally different. Grohl was prioritizing his own wish to fight strong enemy over granting the wish of the evil race and evil race that he belonged to.

But, what meaning was there to that wish?

What lie ahead of that wish?

I had protected Elena and moved aside everything that would hurt her. For that I sought strength and I even threw myself into a fight that could be avoided.

I was scared. Scared of being weak, and scared of Elena getting hurt.

But with that, even if I could protect her physically, I couldn’t protect her heart.

I thought that I was protecting her heart, but I didn’t protect her wish.

Grohl was talking about the pride as an evil race and seeking battle, and yet he didn’t have a pride as a member of the evil race. Seeing him made me

felt that I could understand just a little about what that old man said.

Something like an important thing……that was obvious from the start.

「Now, show me your strength! It looks like you're good with dodging, but can you dodge this-!」

Grohl grinned and emitted great mana from his magic stone.

「──Flare Brid──」

Grohl used an activation word for the first time. In that moment, nearly a hundred small fire bullets filled my surrounding.

「With this you won't be able to dodge even with your illusion! It's a shame to end this so quickly, but it's over!」

The young man lifted up his arm and then swung it down pretentiously.

You should……shut up already.

「──Shadow Walker──」

The fire bullets that were fired all at once scorched the ground. I pierced Grohl's heart from behind while he was full of opening from feeling sure of his victory.

「Gahah……ho…w…」

Carelessness, overconfidence……the girls who I knew wouldn't commit such mistakes.

The young man who looked at me with a disbelieving gaze collapsed. I put on a spare cloak while looking down on his fall coldly and gave him his last words.

「Thank you. I can remember something important thanks to you.」

I wouldn't let Elena die no matter what.

***

It was only several people but there were still some dwarves alive in the adventurer guild.

I thought that the guild allowed itself to be attacked easily because there were only low ranked adventurer remaining there but, there were only guild staffs remaining while most of the low ranked adventurers had apparently run away.

The staffs didn't run away partly because of something like loyalty for their fellow dwarves but, mostly it must be because of Jesha and Jilgan's good leadership until now. They said that even if the organization called the adventurer guild was gone, they remained behind as members of Hogros Company that protected this town.

Some people still lived with pride even in this kind of lawless town. They had their own reason to fight. I too left behind the adventurer guild for my own objective.

「It's burning……」

Fires were rising from many spots inside the town. Looking at the many smokes rising from afar, I could also see a considerable number of dark elves mixed inside the scene. Most likely with Riezan Family included there were more than several hundreds of them.

The merchants and townspeople running about in confusion. But, there were also some townspeople who counterattacked against those attackers with weapons like hatchet or hammer.

「Gyah!?」

One of the Riezan Family members fighting the townspeople dropped his weapon after my pendulum slashed his arm.

There was nothing that I could do for this town. I could only drive away the sparks of trouble that splashed on us, even so, I used my pendulums to

wound the members of Riezan Family and dark elves who I caught sight of while running through the town so that the surrounding townspeople could gang up and took them down.

Seeing them fighting made me felt like they had shown me the strength of the desert people.

They would decide the fate of their town by their own hands.

I……we would escape from this desert.

That was the only way to save Elena's life and support her wish at the same time in this situation.

But before that, I would at least do what I could.

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Cutlass Town was surrounded by walls just like all other towns in general, but there was a part of wall that had crumbled and became connected with dangerous area where monster appeared. Orphans like Chako and others and the destitute people were living there.

I climbed over the ruined wall and headed to one of the watchtowers near here.

There were multiple watchtowers that were build surrounding this town. There were some that were about to crumble just like the one that we turned into our base, but around half of the towers were still functioning. I heard that they would give warning to the town if something happened at the direction of the ruins.

Those remaining watchtowers still weren't ringing the alarm meant that the stampede hadn't come until visible range, or Jesha and others had suppressed it successfully……or,

「You bastard-, if you come any closer──」

「Begone.」

A dark elf tried to draw his bow. I ran while throwing a throwing knife that lodged into between his eyes.

The dark elf wore black armor……as I thought, the evil race army had occupied the watchtowers. I collected my knife from the expired dark elf and used my slashing type pendulum to slash the eyes of a Riezan Family member who jumped out from the tower when he heard the ruckus. I continued closing the distance and used my blade to stab the heart of the man who followed behind that man.

「E-enemy attack!!」

Death throes resounded inside the tower. I leaped inside while Cruzian people who belonged with Riezan Family came down from upstairs at the same time.

If combat between equally strong people happened in close range, it would be more advantageous to have the higher ground where it was possible to use their weight. But even that changed when “magic” came into play.

「──Pain──」

「Giah!?」

The man who came down last──he was last because he was carrying a heavy weapon and wearing heavy armor. Pain sent him into panic and he fell from the stairs, dragging his comrades along with his fall.

Several men got pushed down by the falling large man. I ran up the wall of the spiraling staircase and broke the large man’s neck by stomping on it to be my foothold.

I finished off the enemies who were still breathing before running upstairs at full speed.

「──Stone Shot──!」

「──Dark Mist──」

The moment I ran up to the top floor, I activated my magic at the same time with a dark elf who was lying in wait.

You could determine the target of sorcery with your senses but it wouldn't necessarily hit. The Stone Shot that was fired by sight for only an instant went through the darkness, while I had leaped up until the ceiling using my running momentum. I kicked on the ceiling and then kicked through the face of the man who opened his eyes wide in shock using my heel that had a blade attached.

Even if he was just a rank 3 it would be dangerous for me if he used wide area sorcery like Water Ball just now, but his weak heart that was fixated with bringing certain death rather than using sorcery with weak power resulted on this defeat for him.

.

I mopped up the enemies occupying the tower before reinforcing my eyes to look toward the ruins. I could see the sand cloud blurring the scenery far away and the black armored group wriggling inside it.

「……」

So Jesha and others failed……. That was what it meant for the evil army to have approached until this near. It was also possible that they had taken flight and survived, but based on Jesha and Jilgan's personality, they must have fought to the death. Even if they were still alive there was no way they were still in alright condition.

Even so I couldn't really see the stampede from here. It must be the result of the adventurers' fight. But the fate of this town had been mostly set in stone the moment the adventurers of Hogros Company were defeated.

From what I saw the evil race army numbered around 2000. The number wasn't that big compared to a powerful country's army, but the evil race's army true worth wasn't its quantity but "quality".

The soldiers of human country would have strength around rank 1 to rank 2, while experienced soldier or knight would be around rank 3, but when it came to a large scale battle, human country's army would be largely made up from conscripted militia who didn't even have any decent combat skill.

But there was no weakling in evil race army. The majority of their troops consisted of warrior and sorcerer who were rank 2 or higher. They wouldn't even retreat from battle because of their high fighting spirit. Human race feared them like they were demons.

「This is bad……」

A drop of sweat trickled down my cheek when I saw their marching direction. At this rate……the evil race army would pass nearby the tower that we were using as our base.

I looked at the surrounding. I found what I was looking for inside a basket at the back.

What I was looking for was the method to contact the town. It would be inefficient to send a runner for every single thing. That was why there must be something here and I searched for it. And sure enough I found a lot of dried fiber of succulent plant and also several porcelain jars.

Without hesitation I tossed a bundle of fiber into something that looked like hearth. Then I lit it with daily life magic. I also splashed the content of a jar on it and as expected, dark red smoke started to rise up.

This was most likely something like a smoke signal. My objective coming to this tower was because I thought that perhaps I could convey the situation using the method here to Kamil even if he wasn't in the town. If Ron who was in our base noticed it too then he should be able to understand the situation in the town with this.

Besides, the townspeople could evacuate if they noticed that an attack was coming from outside──.

「──tsu!」

I suddenly felt a chill and turned my gaze outside the tower. The marching evil race army……from the sand cloud that was rising behind them, a tremor that shook the air reverberated and a gigantic sphere of fire was shot out toward this watchtower. The attack blew away the sand cloud on its path.

In that moment, I threw my body to the air from the watchtower's window. The height from here must be about the same like a five-storied building.

Right after that the highest floor of the watchtower I was just inside got burned by the fire sphere. The floor was destroyed with a thunderous roar and fragments scattered everywhere. I kicked on the outer wall to dodge those before spreading out my cloak to decrease my speed while landing on the desert's sand. I rolled on the ground many times in order to neutralize the momentum and impact. I could finally lift up my face after rolling quite far from the tower.

「……」

The tower that was made just from piling up rocks couldn't endure the impact. Its upper half was starting to crumble.

I too would have died if I choose to go down from the staircase. It was just a coincidence but the blast that blew me away also helped me reducing my speed well, and if I didn't fall on the soft sand then I would have been seriously injured.

The attack just now……it was most likely the earth dragon's breath attack.

That dragon's flame was fired from behind the evil race army……? It didn't look like they were getting chased by the dragon. In that case, was that dragon being manipulated by the evil race army…….

「──High Heal──」

I spat out the sand that was mixed with saliva inside my mouth and treated the damage from falling with High Heal.

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▼Aria (Alicia)　Race：Human♀・Rank 4

【Magic Power：１７８／３３０】【Stamina：１９５／２６０】

【Overall Combat Strength：１４９７（With Body Strengthening：１８５３）】

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My remaining mana was around sixty percent……. Even if I counted on my natural recovery from now, it would only recover until seventy percent at best.

Consuming any more mana recovery potion than this wouldn't only give me diminishing return, it would become a bother for me at the critical moment. I took out a nutrition replenishment pill from my pouch and crunched it under my teeth. I put back my cloak that had gotten ragged from arrows and blood before running again through the desert.

It would be dangerous to run away even through the sky if the evil race army possessed long range attack of such might. It would be great if I could neutralize it but, I couldn't mistake my priority.

If we were going to escape then we wouldn't make it in time unless we started immediately.

If it was needed in order to do that……what I had to do was already decided.

***

The sand cloud that the evil race army's march caused had started to come into view far away without even needing to go to higher ground.

I ran for around half a hour through the desert before I finally managed to return to the watchtower we were using as our base.

「Aria-!」

It seemed that Elena had been waiting for me. She ran toward me the moment I entered the tower.

Elena jumped as though to hug me but, she remembered her position and hesitated. She stopped her feet.

「I'm back.」

「Welcome……back」

Elena looked like she choked up when I said that. She stared on my face.

No matter how much nearer our heart had gotten, there was the wall of our position standing between Elena and me. Even though we were running on paths that were side by side with each other, our path wouldn't cross no matter what.

Even in this kind of hard situation……no, exactly because it was this kind of situation that she controlled herself and prioritized her duty as princess. I too had wielded my blade and risked my life for her until now because she was someone like that.

「「……」」

We stared at each other's face without being able to speak the words in the bottom of our heart.

She had gotten……a bit thinner.

Her lovely and lustrous golden hair and white skin were dirtied by sand and dust.

She also couldn't fully recover from her mental and physical fatigue. She couldn't even sleep soundly in this environment. It was faint but there were dark circles that couldn't be hidden fully under her eyes.

She was raised in a palace so it was only natural. Her battlefield wasn't in a place like this. Even so for these two months, Elena had conducted herself firmly without uttering a single complain even though she was living in this environment that was no different from a slum.

I enveloped Elena's cheek with my right hand and wiped away a sand from under her tired eye with my thumb.

Elena's eyes moistened from my unexpected action. She placed her left hand was placed over mine.

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『――――――――――――――!!』

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「「tsu!」」

A tremor that was like a roar came from far away. We lifted up our face at the same time.

「Where are Ron and the children?」

「They are above. The children are also already inside the hot-air balloon. ……What about Kamil?」

「I didn't find him. I fired a smoke signal from other tower. I hope he saw it.」

「We also saw it. Ron started preparing to leave when he saw it. Though as expected, it seems that our fire element magic stone will only be barely enough.」

「I managed to secure some more of it. The situation……」

「Yes, I understand. The long range shooting……it was most likely the dragon's breath. To think that such thing really exist……」

「……Let's hurry.」

「Yes.」

The weakness from before was already gone from Elena's eyes. Even so I once more thought that I wanted to protect her who was forcing herself like this.

「Aria-」

「Aria-san-」

We climbed up to the top of the tower. Ron and Chako raised their voice when they saw me. I took out the magic stone from my Storage and tossed it at Ron, then I patted the shoulder of Chako who was looking pale.

「The children?」

「Y-yes, they already got in but……」

The hot-air balloon's basket could be boarded by five or six adults along with the necessary equipment and food. It was already filled with the food that we had gathered in this one month. There would be no problem with water too if Elena was with them.

Inside the basket was the older Noi who was hugging Rana and Nar while looking scared. Perhaps the dragon's roar had reached until here even with the distance. Dragon's roar caused the weak to feel scared. It seemed Chako was also scared, but she touched the shoulder I patted and color was returning to her face along with relieve.

「Aria. Where's Kamil?」

「I didn't find him. Will he come back here if he saw the smoke signal?」

「I don't know. But……my guess is, the "evil race" won't kill that guy.」

「I see……」

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『――――――――――――!!』

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The tremor resounded once more. Chako and the children screamed.

It should have approached until very near. It was hard to imagine that the evil race army would overlook this tower if they passed nearby. They should notice the sign of people living here if they approached close to here.

If that happened then it would be like my first worry, we would lose our way to escape from this desert even if we managed to get away from here.

「Let's hurry and leave this place! I'm filling the balloon with heat, help me out Lena and Aria-」

「Yes-」

「Roger.」

Ron was already turning up the heat since some time ago, but he cranked up the heat even more using the magic stone that he received from me to attempt to quicken the process. Elena and I pulled the rope of the hot-air balloon that was starting to expand to spread it so it had easier time to become inflated.

「The balloon's strength?」

I asked what was in my mind in the middle of the work. Ron kept working while shaking his head.

「There are spots where the glue still haven't dried up completely. But there should be no problem for several days. Get in already Lena-. Aria, cut the anchoring rope when you see it's time.」

「Got it.」

Elena looked back worriedly even while getting on the balloon. The balloon started to float and I cut the rope so the balloon wouldn't graze the inner wall.

「We're flying-. Get in Aria!」

I cut the last rope and jumped to grab the basket's edge.

The balloon was gradually going up through the broken ceiling and left the top floor that became the rooftop. The balloon's speed was picking up with tantalizing slowness, even so everyone's eyes were shining with anxiety and hope of leaving this town.

But──

The moment the balloon went higher than the broken tower wall, my eyes that I had been straining while hanging on the basket's edge saw that the evil race army had marched until visible range. I noticed that among them there was the earth dragon with its jaws opened and flame gathering inside it.

「Everyone, hold on something-!!」

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──*GOU*──!!

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「Kyaaaah!?」

The fire globe that the dragon shot out hit the highest floor's outer wall. The fragments of the smashed wall hit the balloon. Chako and the other children screamed.

「They found us-! Ron, the balloon-!?」

「I don't know-. But, its rising speed is slow-!」

The balloon part was made from monster leather to resist monster. But, perhaps there was air leaking out from it because of the impact just now or the fragments.

「……」

I turned my eyes toward the dragon while kept holding on the edge.

As expected it wouldn't overlook us huh……. But there was also something that I noticed from the attack just now.

I once heard that dragon's breath didn't come from an organ inside the dragon's body that spouted out flame, that instead it was a [dragon magic].

Dragon could fly in the sky with that huge body and unleash breath attack were because the dragon was using magic with their roar just like how human was using spirit language.

But, when my "eyes" saw the breath attack just now, it felt like the attack was the same like the [Battle Skill] that was a monosyllabic non-elemental magic.

In that case, there should be an interval before dragon could use its breath again just like when human used Battle Skill. Battle Skill couldn't be used continuously. How long it would take until that heat cooled down? Would it be dozens of seconds, or hundreds?

In that case……what I had to do was decided.

「Aria-, wait-!」

Elena seemed to sense something and raised her voice in a scream. She strongly grabbed my hand that was holding on the edge.

「What are you thinking-!?」

Her yell and question were filled with grief from knowing the answer already.

「Let go……」

「No……you must not-! Why are you-」

Elena was holding on my hand so strongly her hands were turning white when I tried to shake her off.

「Everyone'll die at this rate.」

「And, so what!? For you alone to do such thing……」

「Understand」

「I don't understand! Why is it Aria has to-!」

Even Elena had actually understood.

Now that the enemy had noticed us, our chance to survive was exceedingly low even if we remained in this place.

Even if we could fly away, we would only be able to rely on luck to survive from the dragon's breath.

To be able to survive, someone had to stay behind to attract their attention and hold them back. And the only one who could do that before the dragon could unleash its breath attack again was me who had the highest combat strength.

「In that case I will also stay behind-! You are my……」

Elena swallowed back that word that she almost said.

It was something that she should not say. She couldn't say that words as a princess.

Because that day when we were little……the two of us "promised", we swore to each other that even if our path differed, we would never stray from the thorny path that we had decided on our own to walk.

「Elena」

「──tsu」

I called her with her actual name instead of her fake name. Elena lifted up her tear-streaked face.

「I want Elena to live.」

「E-even I──」

「I don't wanna Elena to die. I wanna make Elena's dream come true. I wanna make everything Elena believe to be true.」

「Why……are you……such thing……」

Elena's eyes widened hearing me suddenly changing my way of speaking. I placed my other hand on her hand that was still holding on my hand.

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「Because……cause Elena is my best "friend".」

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Her blue eyes kept widening without blinking. My innocent smile from my childhood that I should have forgotten how to make was reflected on them.

「————tsu」

Elena's hand loosened for a moment and I shook it off. I gently pushed myself off from the hot-air balloon.

Elena leaned forward after me and tried to grab my hand, but that white hand only grabbed empty air.

「──Aria……ARIAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!」

.

I didn't say farewell.

At the end I smiled and squinted my eyes at Elena who was getting further away. Then I bent back to turn a sharp gaze toward the evil race and the dragon.

.

「──Iron Rose──」

.

My pinkish blonde hair changed color to ashen steel color that was like burning iron.

Light scattered and spread out from it like a pair of silver wings. It left a trail behind me like a comet. I kicked on the outer wall and ran down it. My hand touched the dry land as I landed and I glared at the evil army race that was approaching this way.

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「I'll show you my battle.」

The Desert's War Demon

「……It missed huh.」

Ashe spoke out coldly on top of the huge shell dragon that was her ride.

Shell dragon had the name [dragon] but it wasn't a real dragon. The same like wyvern that had wings but no front legs, shell dragon was also a "pseudo dragon". It was just a large lizard that didn't even have wings. No matter how much it grew it would never go past rank 4.

But, a true dragon was fundamentally different. Even the low ranked earth dragon could wipe out a group of adventurer with a single breath attack. It could even destroy a human made tower that was located several kilometers from it.

Just now Aishe found a "strange object" flying away from the top of a broken tower and made the dragon attacked it. But, perhaps the dragon's aim was faulty or the distance was too far, because the attack only managed to scrape off the tower's top part even more while the strange object was still going higher toward the sky.

「I think that is……the thing called [hot-air balloon] isn't it?」

Aishe recalled the true identity of that foreign object when it fully came into view. This was her first time actually seeing one, but she remembered her "big sister" telling her about it several decades ago.

Aishe ordered the attack because of her instinct. But, her instinct didn't betray her.

It was unthinkable that run-down town could possibly have something like that. It was uncertain whether that thing was related to Carlfan Empire or

not, but either way it was highly possible the invasion of evil race army would become leaked to human countries if they let it get away from here.

「Make the earth dragon attack again-! Don't let it get away-」

Aishe ordered another attack at the hot-air balloon, but one of the dark elves beside her quickly bowed his head while trickling cold sweat despite the desert's heat.

「M-my deepest apologies, your excellency, giving "order" in succession is……」

「Tsk」

There was no monster tamer skill. After all it was impossible to enslave a living being forever with merely one ability.

Tamer was a technique based job just like alchemist or blacksmith. Only some clans in the evil race country were passing down that technique. The taming of earth dragon was carried out under the order of the evil race's clan heads, but dragon's taming was extremely difficult and it took several years of process where a whole clan was mobilized for the endeavor that produced a lot of victim.

The earth dragon had stopped attacking the evil race army due to special medicine and suggestion using darkness sorcery, but it was possible the suggestion would become undone if the earth dragon was given order in succession.

「Hurry」

「……Ma'am」

Even so, when Aishe ordered with a frown on her face, the black skin of the man who was the head of the tamer clan turned pale and he ran to the rear where the earth dragon was.

Aishe was still young and she was in an age where usually she would be called as a novice for an elf, but she was feared in the evil race army for her

severe personality. The root of her severity was her experience of losing her only family in the war against human race more than fifty years ago. Her hatred toward human nation was still continuing to smolder even now that more than fifty years had passed.

Aishe would kill anyone who got in her way even if it was woman or children.

Aishe glared at the hot-air balloon with such hatred filling her eyes. It was then the sight of light that flapped like silver wings falling off from there entered her eyes.

***

「……What?」

The marching evil race army numbered 2000 men strong. The hundred man leader, the knight Hasan was the one ordered to be at the forefront of that army. He witnessed the silver light swooping down from the tower that had just gotten attacked by the dragon.

That emitted particles of light that fluttered like it was wings. Because Hasan was watching it from far away, that sight looked like an angel just like in fairy-tale and he unconsciously narrowed his eyes.

「How stupid……」

Hasan unconsciously laughed at himself for having such thought.

Hasan and other dark elves were judged as “evil” by the teaching of the holy church that invaded here from other continent. They were feared as though they were evil demon. Their quarrel with the forest elf that had existed from the beginning was also used by the holy church to drive them away from their fertile lands. Since then the dark elves swore to take revenge and called themselves [evil race].

For someone like them to imagine something as [angel] and even felt entranced by the sight was simply laughable.

But, what was that thing that felt from that flying object? It was still far away so he couldn't see it clearly but perhaps a part of the balloon broke because of the dragon's attack and some glass fragments fell off.

But, there was no denying that there was something at that place. If it was something that could be dangerous to the evil race army then it was also Hasan's duty to eliminate it as the one who was ordered to be the vanguard.

「From here our squad shall head to the tower that the dragon attacked! But, I have no doubt that if it's the valiant people of our clan then we will be able to take care of anything that lie in wait for us there!」

『OOOOOOOOOOOOO!!』

After Hasan gave his speech to his subordinates, the one hundred evil race soldiers responded by raising their weapons before marching toward the tower to hunt for their prey.

Hasan's one hundred troops consisted of the people from the clan that Hasan's father was leading. Even the common soldier in it was rank 2 and even some of the ten men captains who were organizing them were rank 3. Their strength was no comparison to the likes of human soldier. Even if the enemy outnumbered them by twice, his subordinates would be able to easily destroy them. The thought made Hasan's lips loosened up.

But……his expectation was overturned.

「Young lord! "Something" is heading here!」

「You said, something……be clear when reporting──」

A young soldier who was marching ahead raised his voice. Hasan reflexively turned his gaze to that direction and caught sight of that "something".

A silhouette clad in a tattered cloak was sprinting through the desert with terrifying speed straight to here from the direction of the tower.

The sun was setting and the sky started to be dyed orange. In the middle of the orange sky and the sand, the shadow that stretched out from the tattered cloak w

as undulating like a monstrous bird. The figure looked like an evil spirit that appeared in desert. Hasan unconsciously gulped.

「Fire arrow-! Don't let it get closer!」

The vice commander beside Hasan who was also his uncle gave command to the men. Then he smiled wryly while turning his gaze toward his still young nephew.

「Hasan, don't lose focus. After all you are the one who will become our next clan head.」

「I'm sorry uncle……」

The trained archers immediately fired their arrows. Dozens of arrows rained down on the sprinting shadow. If these trusted subordinates and comrades were at his side, he didn't need to fear even a real evil spirit. ……Or that was how it should be.

「Wha-!?」

The fired arrows didn't hit. The arrows that were fired in an arching trajectory were left behind in the dust of the shadow that sped up even more.

As the result the archers hurriedly nocked their next arrow. But how long it would take until they readied their next arrow? This was different from firing arrows toward a large army. How long the archer would take to aim at a far away enemy who was alone?

The enemy figure approached with speed that was several times of ordinary person. Fear spread among the soldiers at the forefront for an instant. It became anxiety that also spread toward the archers. When they had fixed

their aiming, the enemy figure had already closed the distance until the soldiers at the forefront.

「Aaaaaaa!」

The forefront soldiers yelled like they were screaming while hiding their body behind their shield. Then they thrust out their long spear without even checking where the enemy was. But, there was no meaning at all to spears that weren't even aimed at anything. That enemy used their palm to divert away the spear tip that was thrusting toward them, and without stopping they used a large shield as foothold and lightly jumped over the spears line.

「……Hih」

The figure that was clad in tattered cloak fluttered in the air like a ghost. The silver light that leaked out from the hem of the cloak made the archers let out their shrieks.

Jet black blade glinted from the shadow of the cloak. They were cut apart by an invisible blade without being able to let go of their bow. The survivors threw away their bow and drew out their short sword, but at that moment the figure already left behind the archers and closed the distance to Hasan and others.

「Don't let it get closer-!」

The vice commander immediately gave instruction to his men. The elite guards protecting the clan head's son thrust their spears toward the approaching enemy.

Several spears stabbed the tattered cloak that was fluttering in the air. But that enemy kicked on the air and changed posture, then after using their cloak as bait they stomped on the face of one soldier while landing on the ground.

「Impossible……that was like……」

The vice commander's eyes widened, but a flying knife was planted between his eyes before he could finish speaking.

Swiftness like lightning. Cutting into enemy formation alone to kill the enemy leader. That fighting style and that martial art, it reminded him of a famous female evil race who died in battlefield decades ago.

「……"War Demon"……」

A single girl was reflected on Hasan's eyes. The desert's war demon.

Hair that was burning with ashen steel color danced in the wind. Until the blade that was thrown from that hand scattered Hasan's life into nothingness, those sharp eyes were simply turned toward the front with Hasan's figure never even entering it.

***

First…….

I killed two people who seemed to be the commanders of the unit that marched at the forefront, and then I immediately broke into a run again.

I had listened from teacher about the way to fight against group. A unit's chain of command would be thrown into chaos when its head was crushed and it would become unable to exhibit its actual strength. But that would only be the case if the killing was done continuously one after another.

My limit would definitely arrive sooner or later if I fought alone. What I was doing was nothing more than buying time.

Even so there was meaning to this fight.

Sorry……Elena.

When we were little, that day I promised you that if you wished for it, I'll kill even the demon king……but now I was risking my life even though you didn't ask it from me.

I slipped through the soldiers around the commander who were falling into chaos and turned my gaze toward the direction of their main force.

.

▼Aria (Alicia)　Race：Human♀・Rank 4

【Magic Power：１５３／３３０】【Stamina：１８８／２６０】

【Overall Combat Strength：１４９７（During Special Body Strengthening：２７９７）】

【Battle Skill：Iron Rose/Limit 154 Second】

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154 seconds remaining──my target was the evil race army's general's head.

「A Re-!」

I strengthened my speed and my legs kicked on the sandy ground. The impact blew sand backward.

I left behind the scenery around me as I sprinted forward. Light residue trailed behind me like a comet's trail. Dozens of arrows were fired from the main force that noticed my approach.

「What's that thing!?」

「Kill it quickly!」

「We'll hit our own men!」

The soldiers fell into confusion. Because of the confusion their spears and blades attacked artlessly. They grazed my body but there would be no need to stop as long as it wasn't lethal wound.

I diverted one spear that lunged at me to hit other soldier. I leaped forward while rotating my body and cut down the enemy that got in my way.

Not yet. I should be able to move faster. I passed through inside my accelerated sense of time, slapped away even the scattered blood in the air with my hand while sprinting with speed that the enemies couldn't follow with their sight, then I leaped to the bosom of a man who seemed to be a commander. He was looking at me with a dumbfounded face before I deeply planted my dagger between his eyes.

……Second.

***

「What, is that……?」

The evil race army was in confusion. That girl suddenly appeared, sprinted through the battlefield with speed that was unthinkable for human, then killed several unit commanders in less than a minute.

Of course the evil race army also didn't just stand around watching. They changed formation, changed weapon, and sometimes even used sorcery that hit their own allies.

Even so the girl didn't stop. Blood was trickling from several parts of her body and her hair that was burning with ashen iron color was also dyed with blood, even so she continued to swing her black blade that was also dyed with blood.

「Stop!!」

The number of commanders who were killed by that murderous blade had gone past five. That girl──Aria was hit with several arrows, even so she continued cutting her way toward the main force where General Aishe was located.

「You bastard, who are you-!」

Aishe fixed her stare at that figure and stood on the back of her huge shell dragon while drawing out her sword.

Hearing that voice and seeing that figure, Aria instantly judged that the girl was the general. An elite guard stood on her way to stop her, but a pendulum crushed his skull and she turned her gaze sharply toward Aishe.

「Keep me company.」

「What……tsu」

The elite guards instantly surrounded Aria. They didn't see how she could do anything more in this situation. They all pointed their blade toward the foolish enemy who leaped toward her own death when Aria took out a jar from her storage and tossed it.

「Be careful!」

「Stop that thing!」

The well trained elite guards immediately moved. They threw a short sword that broke the jar midair. But it wasn't targeting Aishe. Its aim was──.

『GUGYAAAAAAAAAA!』

「What the-!?」

The content of the broken jar splashed on the shell dragon's face and a terribly offensive smell rose up.

Most likely it was a type of nerve poison that caused intense pain. The shell dragon lost its senses from the pain and intense smell and started to rampage. Aishe who was standing on it couldn't keep her balance and kneeled down.

An opening was created for an instant. Aria slipped past the elite guards in that moment and clung on the shell dragon. At the same time Aishe threw her short sword despite her unbalanced posture. But Aria too kicked on the shell dragon's skin and then kicked on the air to dodge the incoming short

sword. Then she pulled the rein with all her strength and showed a path of escape to the rampaging shell dragon.

「Damn you-!!」

Even though her eyes widened in astonishment at Aria's martial art, Aishe slashed at the bloody Aria from atop the horribly shaking shell dragon. Magic steel sword and magic steel dagger clashed and created sparks that scattered around.

「A human woman-!! Why do you get in our way-!」

「Because I have something to protect.」

Aria's stamina had dropped until the limit from the attack sorcery and blades that hit her. But, the sword of rank 5 Aishe was unable to push Aria back.

Aishe was superior in pure technique. But, Aria's status was strengthened by Iron Rose. And not only that, on this battleground with unstable foothold, Aishe who was a member of a long lived race was being pushed back by a human girl who hadn't even lived for twenty years due to the difference in experience of the carnage they had struggled through.

「You bastard, so this is your aim-!」

She separated Aishe from her subordinates and lured her to a disadvantageous battleground. That way of fighting, her movement just now, it was as though she closely resembled the person who was called as "War Demon" in the battlefield.

「But it's pointless-! You can't defeat me no matter what kind of trick you played-!」

Even so Aishe had the technique that she had polished for decades as a warrior of evil race. Even if the enemy possessed abnormal status, she wasn't strong enough to defeat Aishe.

「I already told you, you're keeping me company.」

「Tsu!」

There Aishe finally realized what was the aim of the girl before her.

The shell dragon was running to the rear. What was in that direction? That way there was the earth dragon who was finally going to fire its next attack toward the hot-air balloon.

『GUGAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!』

The manipulated earth dragon was distracted by the rampaging shell dragon that crashed on it.

The taming that was applied on a true dragon like the earth dragon wasn't a complete thing. Even so, an attack from a tiny being like human wouldn't even annoy it. If its mind was in normal state then something like a shell dragon's attack wouldn't be something that was even worth its notice.

But, the imperfect mind control resulted in the awakening of its instinctual defensive instinct when it saw the shell dragon's huge body approaching.

.

──*GOU*──!!

.

The fire ball that should be fired at the hot-air balloon was directed toward the shell dragon.

「Tsk!」

Aishe tsked hard and jumped backward. Aria also leaped away to match her.

The shell dragon kept running even then got burned by the earth dragon's breath. It expired in this desert. Aria was using its huge body to shield her, even so the blast blew her away and the light of Iron Rose vanished from her hair. Aishe saw the good opportunity and brandished her sword, but

Aria too never took her eyes off from her even while getting blown away. The two swung their blade at the same time.

.

「──Vorpal Blade──!!」

「──Critical Edge──!!」

Two Battle Skills were unleashed at the same time. Those two clashed in the air. Aishe's sword pierced Aria's stomach, while Aria's blade tore Aishe's side.

Both were blown away while spilling a lot of blood, then their body fell on the ground.

And then several seconds later……one side was slowly standing up with unsteady legs.

「What the hell, is she……-!」

Aishe pressed her hand on her heavily bleeding side while asking the same question for the nth times. She walked toward the unconscious pink haired girl.

Why did this girl fought until this far?

Wasn't she scared of dying?

Why was this girl knew that technique?

At the last moment, she couldn't kill her with that Battle Skill because she dodged using that person's technique.

What was with her hair color? It was slightly different but Aishe had seen pink hair color before.

「But……」

She was dangerous. Aishe instantly made that judgment.

She had a mountain of questions she wanted to ask. But, as a general of the evil race army, she couldn't spare the life of someone who could obstruct the evil race army's invasion and killed multiple commanders alone.

「Die」

Aishe lifted up her sword even though she herself was heavily injured.

But at that time──

「Wait-!!」

Someone stopped Aishe before she could swing down her sword.

「You……-!」

Aishe's eyes widened seeing that boy's figure.

He had appeared there without her realizing it. Standing there was the prince of evil race country whose whereabouts became unknown since several years ago. He was staring at Aishe while breathing hard.

「Lower your sword, General Aishe. I order you under my name to hand her to my custody.」

The prince came here riding on a beast accompanied by two servants, a man in his prime and a still young girl. Aishe wordlessly got into a glaring match with the prince in respond to his words. Then she spat out her saliva that was mixed with blood and quietly lowered her sword.

「Do as you please with that dying girl-, but, if she actually pull through from this……then I also have a business with her. I have questions to ask her about my elder sister's technique.」

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「We're falling, grab on something-!」

Ron yelled inside the basket of the hot-air balloon that was gradually losing altitude.

The balloon didn't get attacked by the dragon again and managed to fly away. But, the first attack apparently caused some tower's fragments to hit and damage the balloon. Around two hours after they left the town, the balloon reached its limit and started to lose altitude.

「……Aria……tsu」

Elena was holding on the basket's edge while muttering the girl's name.

Why did she do something like that?

Why did she go off on her own?

At the end Aria called Elena her [friend]. The two of them had different standing. Elena thought that word mustn't be said no matter how much she wished for it.

The smile that Aria showed her at the end flashed inside her mind.

Was that, Aria's……Alicia's true smile? Or was it a smile that she forced herself to make because it was the last time? Was the usual her just a false mask……?

(……No, that's not it.)

Both were the true Aria. That must be a smile that she was showing to her true friend.

It wasn't because that would be the last time. She wouldn't accept that as the last time. Aria was alive. It was impossible for Aria to break her promise with Elena and died.

「……I won't forgive you if you die.」

Elena muttered that and lifted her face. The look of grief that was showing from her eyes until then vanished. In its place was a strong light and faint

anger.

Aria went that far in order to keep Elena alive.

Aria absolutely wouldn't die. She wouldn't forgive her if she died. She would head to Carlfan Empire, contact Claydale Kingdom, and then she would absolutely save Aria even if she had to use her everything.

That was why Elena swore that she would survive come hell or high water.

「Ron, please give me instruction-!」

「Lena……」

「I'm not depressed anymore. Also, I do not mind if you call me "Elena".」

「……I get it. Go pull that rope over there-」

Seeing the depressed Elena started moving caused Chako and the other children's scared faces to recover slightly.

But that didn't mean that the situation was changing for the better with that. The balloon's altitude was still unstable, and it was unclear whether they would be able to deal with danger now that their two strongest fighters were absent.

「Ron, monster from the sky-!」

「At this kind of time-!」

Two Giant Crows were approaching from the sky. They were rank 3 monster because of their huge size, but they wouldn't be that great of a threat if only the hot-air balloon was in proper condition.

But in this current situation, it was unclear how long the balloon would last even though it was made from monster leather. Even Elena who could attack was unable to use sorcery because of the shaky foothold. If even one of the ropes that were connecting the basket to the balloon was severed

while they were standing idly, it would become difficult to even land softly. It was even possible that it would become impossible to repair the balloon.

『Gueeeeeeeee!』

「Kyaaah!」

One of the Giant Crows launched an attack at the balloon. The basket shook violently. The ground was getting closer and Ron was working hard to at least land the balloon on a flat ground, but finally the other crow charged toward the rope.

「──Hurricane──」

In that moment, a level 4 wind sorcery was fired from somewhere and tore apart the charging crow, blowing it away toward the sky.

Elena sighed in admiration seeing that sorcery. What impressed her wasn't the sorcery's level, rather it was the technique that blew away the Giant Crow without shaking the hot-air balloon despite being a wide area sorcery.

Everyone was surprised. Even the remaining Giant Crow stopped attacking when a jet black beast leaped like a gust of wind toward the crow that had gotten close to the ground. It was dragged toward the ground where it got ripped apart.

「W-we're falling-」

Ron came back to his senses and raised his voice. The hot-air balloon landed on the sandy ground after that. Cutlass Town looked very small from this location.

But it was difficult to call the landing soft. Both the balloon and the basket fell on their side, but thanks to that the children also fell on the sandy ground and got away from the crash with only shock and bruises.

「Is everyone alright-」

「Yes, we are alright……but」

Everyone nodded at Ron's question. Nobody was seriously injured. At most they were only bruised or scratched. Their feeling of shock and surprise were greater than that and they became absentminded, but then a woman voice called out to them. The voice came from someone wearing a hood that covered most of her face. She seemed to be the one who fired the sorcery just now.

「You guys, it doesn't look like anyone is injured.」

She seemed like an adult woman and her gentle voice made Chako and the children exhaled in relieve.

「Thank you very much for your help. But……you are?」

Even so Ron and Elena were showing a little bit of wariness. The woman smiled wryly and removed her hood, showing the face of a dark elf.

.

「I'm searching for someone. By the way, have any of you seen my pink haired surly disciple (daughter) around here?」

Epilogue ― Pulsation

「……So something like that happened. I should call that child as stupid disciple too now……. I'm sorry for that miss. That child had troubled you.」

「No……. Aria has saved me many times. But, I was not aware that Aria's sorcery teacher is a dark elf.」

The sun had set and there was only the starlight illuminating the desert. Serjura and Elena who were sitting around the bonfire had finished talking about what had happened until now and they bowed to each other.

「……」

Ron had been looking somewhat anxious since he heard Serjura's name. He was continuing to repair the hot-air balloon in order to distract himself. He had no intention to talk to anyone about that name, even so the shock that name brought him was great.

The two children who were scared at the Coeurl Nero was also sleeping on Chako's lap now. Noi who was the only dark elf among their group seemed to be embarrassed or perhaps nervous seeing a female dark elf with motherly appearance which was rarely seen even at the town. He was getting his head patted by Serjura while staying still.

Right now Nero was working together with Serjura, but it was fundamentally disinterested with human except Aria. It was standing guard against monster at some distance right now because it didn't deem it acceptable for people who Aria had protected to get injured in her absence.

「I left the country right away you see……so I don't know the situation there. My bad.」

「No, it is heartening to know how you took action for Aria's sake. And, what will Serjura-sama do after this?」

「Let's see……before that, can you tell me what're you planning to do first miss?」

Serjura looked straight into Elena's eyes.

She thought that she had strong eyes. She immediately noticed that this was the girl who Aria wanted to protect. And she felt like she could understand why that surly and awkward beloved disciple of her would risk her life to protect this girl.

But at the same time she was also feeling concern. The impression that she got from talking to her was that both Aria and Elena needed each other's existence in the deep part of themselves.

It would be fine if the relationship of the two was of master and guard. She wouldn't mind even if they were friends with each other. But, if Elena started saying that she wanted to come with Serjura to save Aria, it was possible that their relationship wasn't friendship but dependence.

But, Elena nodded quietly to Serjura's words with a calm gaze.

「First I will head to Carlfan Empire. I will disclose my identity to them and seek assistance to contact my home country. I'm thinking to contact the prime minister and ask him to dispatch bodyguard knights from the black ops along with Aria's comrades……the "Rainbow Sword" to come here.」

Rainbow Sword was a rank 5 adventurer party that was distinguished even in Claydale Kingdom. Normally the higher ranked someone was the easier it would be to move to other country too, but someone with strength like them would also form deeper connection with nobility which made it difficult to go to foreign country.

The party members were compassionate people so perhaps they were thinking to save Aria too. But, if they were hindered to come here because

of financial problem or transport problem or anything, Elena wouldn't hesitate to use her authority in full if it was for Aria's sake.

「I see……」

It was a calm judgment, and yet she also wouldn't be choosy with her method. The mettle that Elena showed made Serjura nodded thinking that there should be no problem with her like that.

「I'll also go to that surly disciple so don't worry. That "black cat" will also come along.」

Serjura pointed behind her with her thumb. Nero snorted its nose as though it was laughing and turned aside.

「Besides……if it's Dalton and Miranda then they might be moving already.」

「You are acquainted with the two of them……」

「It's a past story……keep this a secret from those two.」

Serjura grinned at Elena's question.

She was enemies with those two members of Rainbow Sword along with the retired Samantha who had tried to kill each other several times in the battlefield more than fifty years ago. They considered each other enemy at that time, but it was exactly because they were enemy that she understood that at the very least they weren't people who would abandon their comrade.

And Serjura too…….

(I'll take you back, idiot daughter. Even if it's from the evil race country……)

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The harbor city of Carlfan Empire was known as a scenic place with pure white buildings that looked like a box standing in a row.

A huge sailing ship was arriving in that harbor early in the morning. The crest drawn on its sail belonged to a powerful noble of Claydale Kingdom that anyone in the knew would know……it was the house crest of Melrose House that was still respected like a royalty by countries that respected tradition.

In this harbor a lot of merchant ships and the like were coming and going despite the time that was still early morning. That ship was receiving priority to be guided by a small ship of the administration bureau to dock on the harbor. Inside that ship was a prominent adventurer party of Claydale Kingdom.

「We finally arrived-!」

A man with medium build stretched his body. His movement was making cracking sounds here and there after around a month of sea trip.

Appearance-wise the man didn't really have any outstanding trait and he looked like he was at the middle of his thirty. But his actual age was near forty and in addition his behavior was like someone far older than his actual age.

「Viro is already an actual "uncle" now.」

「I don't want to hear that from you Mira.」

「……Aaan?」

Even a forest elf who was over a century old would look like a twenty years old. And if it was an elf who was raised in the forest they also wouldn't lose their innocence yet even after living that long. But Mira who had lived in human country for more than a century had completely become "old lady" inside to a degree that would make her outside appearance felt like a fraud.

「You guys, don't fool around. Come down and do your preparation. Be quick.」

The leader Dalton sighed in exasperation seeing the two of them glaring at each other. He too was a mountain dwarf whose age had gone past a hundred, but rather than his age, it was his height that stood out more seeing that he was more than 180 cm tall when a dwarf's height was normally around 160 cm.

Beside him was a large human man who was even taller than him. He was wearing light metal armor and a great sword on his back. He was watching his comrades' exchange with a wry smile while being fully equipped like that.

「You too Feld, is your preparation finished already?」

「There's the matter of her highness the princess but, Aria is Viro's student right? Shouldn't you worry a bit more about her?」

「That girl you see……it feels like worrying for her will be just a pointless endeavor.」

Viro scratched his head awkwardly in respond to Feld's exasperated voice.

After all that disciple had done a lot of crazy things ever since she was seven years old more than five years ago, so there was trust between them to the point that they wouldn't worry about the other.

But, Aria was a complicated existence for Feld. She was his comrade but she was also a good looking girl who drew his eyes toward her. At the same time he was also thinking of her like a little sister that he should protect.

If either her appearance or her conduct matched her actual age, he would be able to treat her as a "child", but he often almost mistook her as a girl of the same age because of how reliable she was.

「You guys, the princess has higher priority than Aria. We'll go to the palace right away with that person after we arrived at the harbor. There

we'll talk with this country's prime minister. You come along Mira. Viro and Feld, you two go buy carriage and food.」

「Yes yes.」

「Mira is the one going with you?」

Mira casually replied at Dalton's words while Viro glanced at her with a puzzled look.

If there was negotiation then Viro usually would also be present, and Feld was still considered a noble so it should be fine to take him along to make him be seen. That was what Viro wanted to say but Dalton's face turned bitter.

「……They won't come out at the open but there's also dark elf in this country. Try imagine if Mira accidentally run into one of them.」

「Aa~……I see.」

「Are you two talking about mee……?」

When the topic about dark elf came up, Mira put on a warlike smile which was unusual for a forest elf like her.

The white skinned forest elf and dark skinned dark elf were hating each other. That hostility already existed even before the dark elf got called evil race. It was said that the prejudice both sides were harboring toward each other was solidifying from hearing their parents grumbling about it for generations.

Mira herself had her prejudice toward dark elf fading from living for a century in human city, but evil race was a different story. That too was because of how she got thoroughly enraged by an evil race woman who she met in the battlefield decades ago. Even now she would reflexively leak killing intent when she caught sight of dark elf.

.

「Everyone of Rainbow Sword, I am already finished with my preparation.」

It was then, a woman carrying a leather suitcase and a parasol called out to them as though she had been waiting for when their talk was over.

「Baroness Layton, I say, we will be finished with our preparation before the ship arrived at the harbor.」

「That's good to know.」

Dalton and the baroness bowed their head to each other, while Viro's complexion worsened because those words were most likely pointed to him who still hadn't finished preparing.

Baroness Sera Layton.

She was a high ranked maid for the royal family and also a black ops knight who was one of the people in charge of the security of the queen's palace.

Originally a high ranked noble should be the one sent to negotiate with Carlfan Empire, but the king who was worried for his daughter's safety made a request for her to be the one sent out because she was someone really trusted and also known by the important people of various countries.

Usually she was constantly wearing nothing but maid uniform, but today she was wearing an adult dress with calm navy blue color.

「Everyone, I believe all of you are already aware of it but, our highest priority is the safety of her highness the princess. Of course, it is also desirable for her highness's bodyguard, Aria to be also rescued if possible, but we shall prioritize bring her highness back home.」

Aria had become her daughter although it was only through adoption, but she was acting coldly because she was separating her personal matter from public matter. Even so…….

「I am asking for everyone's full cooperation. I too will not spare any effort to provide assistance with my all. If the stupid nobles of Carlfan Empire

make trouble to get in the way of rescuing her highness and my daughter, I shall remove them physically if need be.」

「「……」」

Dalton and Feld fell silent by the sudden extreme remark from this prim and proper lady.

According to a rumor that they heard, she had brutally subdued her son who was throwing tantrum about coming along to save his big sister before boarding this ship.

Viro who had been aware of that severity of Sera from before let out a sigh before muttering.

「……You're saying that, but ain't it you who doted on that girl the most?」

「Did you say something……?」

「Nothing at all!」

***

At the Claydale Kingdom, in a mansion that was owned by a high ranked noble inside the royal sorcery academy, a girl who was clad in crimson dress was enjoying a tea's aroma on a wide terrace.

「There's nothing to do.」

The long hair that was so black as though to devour the light undulated and entangled the finger that was fiddling around with it.

Her skin should be called as unhealthily pale instead of white. The dark circles around her eyes made it looked like her eye sockets were caved in. Because of those she gave off the impression of a ghost rather than a sickly person.

She was one of the crown prince's fiancées and a count's daughter, Lady Carla Lester.

There was a smile on her lips despite claiming to be bored. But that wasn't a sunny smile to reassure people. It was a delighted smile that made others anxious.

The royal family and her father had imposed house arrest on Carla.

It was a punishment for attacking the holy church in the capital, massacred the members of the devotion corps who were considered as virtuous people, and harmed Nathanital, the grandson of the head priest who was a baron of the robe.

But an amicable settlement with the holy church had been reached perhaps because the holy church's hand also wasn't clean in this matter, even so there was no erasing the scandal. Carla's father, Count Lester wished for the achievement of producing a queen from his house, while the royal family also wanted to form connection with influential noble, and most of all there was the secret agreement between Carla and the king, so they could only punish her lightly with house arrest.

An aide of Carla's father had come to this mansion several times in order to monitor Carla.

Carla's father and his aide acted haughtily toward her when she was little, but since they noticed that Carla's strength had surpassed her father who was the head of the royal sorcerers, the father refused to meet his daughter while the aide had fear that couldn't be hidden inside his eyes when he looked at Carla.

She wondered what kind of face her father would make if she killed his aide. She once had burned an aide until only his bones remained, but her father who hated scandal covered up that case.

「Fufu」

Nathanital whose face was burned by her still hadn't recovered fully even now after a month had passed. His face still had burn wound on it. She had meticulously burned it to that degree, so it would surely need half a year until the nerves of his face were regenerated.

It was only once a week, but her fiancée the crown prince Ervan sometimes visited her.

He came to visit her partly because the king told him to do so, but it was also because of his own earnestness as her fiancée. Because of that he was feeling cornered and ran toward that foolish woman for consolation, but Carla felt that foolishness was of his was likeable.

Even his dear little sister went missing, so his heart was falling even more ill. He was a truly, truly foolish and adorable man.

He was the symbol of Claydale Kingdom's glory and happiness that Carla hated.

She wondered how chaotic the country would become, how many people would die if he became king.

Because of that Carla was sowing the seeds of discord by supporting the noble faction, invited the evil race into the country, and buried his supporter in the darkness.

The greater the anxiety surrounding Ervan became, the more he would become dependent to that foolish woman. Seeing his heart getting further away from Lady Clara who was genuinely loving him was unbearably delightful.

When Ervan gave both his body and heart to that woman, she wondered which one she should kill to create the greatest hurt. A smile formed on Carla's lips as she imagined that.

「There's nothing to do.」

Even so she was feeling bored. She knew the biggest reason of that.

That was because “she” wasn’t here.

Aria……the only girl who would kill her.

The only human who Carla recognized.

She wanted to fight her to the death in the middle of the burning capital. She wanted to be killed by Aria who had gotten serious.

Rather than dying from sickness, rather than dying in the hand of riffraff, rather than dying from getting judged and put under guillotine, she wanted to live solely for that girl’s sake and die by her hand.

If it was Aria then she would certainly return alive no matter what kind of rigorous circumstance befell her. She would use all those hardships to nourish herself and obtained the strength that could kill Carla before returning.

But, soon it would be Carla who started getting bored with a life that lacked stimulation because that girl wasn’t here.

.

「Perhaps I should go to pick her up soon. Will she be happy I wonder?」

Carla closed her eyes ecstatically like a girl in love……a chillingly sweet smile formed on her lips.

***

It was a dark room, with damp air, and wall and floor that were made from stone…….

Inside an underground prison of an old castle that was located north of the desert, there was a wounded girl who was chained to the wall. She quietly opened her eyes and glared at the “darkness” with strong jade green eyes.

Side Story: I Want To Become Heroine

「———, go over there quickly!」

The little girl was given order by the person who seemed to be her “mother”. The girl didn’t remember her own name. She was unable to find any special meaning in the given name that was nothing more than a “code” used by the woman who seemed to be her mother only to give her order.

This woman so to speak was a person doing “night work”.

She was a pretty person even in the eye of the girl who was still little. She was dressed with flashy getup and lived flashily……this person was suitable for that way of living.

It seemed that she had great confidence in her own look. The woman acted haughtily even toward the other women who were her coworkers which made them hated her.

Even so the mother and daughter weren’t the same person. Even if the woman who seemed to be her mother was hated, even those other women would feel sympathy when they looked at the little girl who was treated cruelly by her mother, even then they naturally distanced themselves from her and treated her like she didn’t exist.

Their personality and attitude were different but, she was avoided even more than her mother who was easy to understand in a sense. She was seen like she was a foreign object that couldn’t be comprehended.

The girl wasn't good with "woman". That was because since she was born and until she gained awareness of her surrounding, she always got tyrannized by "woman" in the form of her mother. The other women also didn't help the little girl inside the room. Only the "men" who were all her mother's guest would give the girl food or treat her affectionately.

Inside the girl "man" was someone who gave her protection. "Woman" was someone who tormented her. That kind of simple outline was created in her mind.

The male guests were doting on the girl perhaps because the girl's look was very similar with the woman who seemed to be her mother.

She was a little girl with well-ordered features, sleepy looking eyes, and often looked up to male with an adoring gaze. Few men would spurn a little girl like that.

And then today too she was chased out of the room by the woman who was bringing in a man, just like usual. The girl didn't feel like relying on other woman and wandered through the night on her own. By consoling the pitiful man who didn't manage to get the woman who seemed to be her mother to keep him company, she obtained a place to sleep and food for that day.

.

The girl was aware that she had an excellent look.

But, she also noticed the stark difference between herself and the woman who seemed to be her mother.

The woman acted haughtily toward other females in order to bask in a sense of superiority. She only fished for good looking male customer was also because of the same reason.

But the girl was different. The girl who grew up not knowing her father or even the love of her mother simply sought to be loved.

She hated woman. That was why she sought love only from man who treated her affectionately.

She didn't care about their look or anything. Their birth or status also didn't matter. Anyone would be fine as long as they would love the girl as their number one.

The girl simply wanted to get a lot of love.

But, the thing that the woman who was a mother sought and the thing that the girl who was a daughter sought were different.

With the increase of male who would dote on her like she was their own daughter, the girl felt that the woman who liked to pick only the male who suited her preference was becoming a "tumor" for herself. She grew to think of the woman who seemed to be her mother as unpleasant.

「I don't need that thing anymore.」

That was why, she abandoned her.

It began from a coincidence. A stampede attacked the territory of Baron Horace that was adjacent to monster habitat. The stampede's scale wasn't big, but the town was attacked and more than a thousand people became victim.

The woman who brought a man into her room was late in escaping. The girl who was aware of the monsters approaching put something in front of the woman's door and ran away.

The woman who was like a tumor for the girl was gone. But the little girl's scheme didn't go well. Many of the males who were doting on the girl also died. Even those who survived had their house destroyed and lost their job, so they left the town.

But, a lot of orphanages were opened because of the many people who died. There the girl schemed to enter an orphanage and blended among the orphans.

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The girl was lucky that the orphanage that she slipped into had an environment that could be called as the worst.

The orphanage's budget was slashed until the very bare minimum. There the old hag who managed the place accepted a lot of orphans with just small amount of donation. The reason she could do that was because she was using powerless children as labor and exploited them dry.

The manual labor was harsh and the food was scarce, but the girl managed to get by without much problem by cajoling older boys and influenced them. She became hated by other female orphans because of that and they bullied her, but she perceived that as the girls being jealous of her and used that to act as victim and ask the boys to protect her.

But, she learned that the money that could be earned from making orphans worked didn't amount to much. The old woman was making children working so she could have it easy, while the reason she was making a lot of money was because she sent out the good looking orphans not to be adopted, but to be sold to rich people.

Even though the other orphans didn't realize it, the girl could find out because of her life before this. But the girl didn't try to tell anyone about it or feel anything was wrong about it. Because she wanted to be loved by a man as a woman rather than getting adopted as a child.

But it wasn't the girl who got chosen. The girl who had no interest to those of the same gender didn't know much about the girl who got chosen, but looking closer, it was the pink haired girl who often got more works pushed on her because she was always working without complaining.

The girl thought. How could she attract the man's interest so she could replace that girl…….

However, the pink haired girl vanished the next day and the old woman who managed the orphanage was murdered. Because of that the person who should come to buy children didn't appear and the management of the

orphanage was entrusted to a servant of Baron Horace……then the girl obtained a “magic stone” that hid knowledge of the future inside it.

.

It was a guide to reach the side of males who felt like they were living above the cloud……existences who were completely beyond her reach until now.

A path to become the “main heroine character”.

Something like a will was dwelling inside the magic stone. It tried to swallow the girl’s mind from the blood that trickled from her fingertip that got nicked on the magic stone’s jagged edge. But perhaps it had no compelling force because it wasn’t in the heart where the blood flows gathered, or perhaps because of the strength of the girl’s feeling, so the stone was reduced into a mere supplier of necessary knowledge for the girl.

The girl’s wish was only one……to be loved by a lot of males.

The kid who never received love from her mother and didn’t even know who her father was might just be searching for fatherhood from unknown males.

Since that day the girl started to use the name [Alicia]. She narrated that in her early life she was [the daughter who was given birth by a noble lady who eloped] to replace the existence called Alicia.

It could be called as an obsession. The girl who lived until now just to be loved repainted all her memories with the woman who was her mother who she didn’t even love from the start with “the game’s heroine”. She even perfectly traced the mannerism, speech, expression, and a part of the heroine’s way of thinking.

Alicia, the original heroine. The otome game’s image that served to display her even more attractively.

The male orphans were enticed by the “figure that showed the loveliest image” based on those. They believed what the girl said as truth and spread it around, which finally lured in a noble house that had blood relationship with the original heroine.

.

The girl became an adopted daughter of a viscount house. She became Alicia Mercis.

By officially getting on the heroine route, she would be able to seduce nobly boys from here on.

The girl had the “knowledge” that she obtained from the magic stone. All the capture targets harbored darkness whether big or small inside their heart. At present they all had status, but they weren’t demonstrating any proportionate true worth to it.

The game’s heroine would confront the darkness of the respective capture target, worried together, got hurt together, and with that they would grow together where in the end the capture target would display their true worth and fell in love with the heroine.

The “woman” inside the magic stone was recommending to the girl to conquer the [crown prince] who had the highest status but relatively low difficulty level. But from the start the girl didn’t have any intention to conquer just one person.

She wanted all love. Even if she would choose the crown prince at the end, she couldn’t give up anything else than that from the start.

The “woman” in the magic stone insisted.

It was impossible to simultaneously conquer more than one capture targets──she said.

Human’s heart wouldn’t be moved unless you wholly faced them as a human, one at a time.

But, the girl didn't confront the darkness and wound in the heart of the capture targets, Instead she affirmed their whole being, the good and the bad and spoiled them.

The "woman" in the magic stone insisted.

Nobody would be able to become happy like that──she said.

But. The girl's wish was to be loved by as many males as possible. Everything else after that didn't matter to her.

Even if, the capture targets got crushed under their own darkness and fell into self-destruction.

Even if, their self-destruction dragged her down too with them and resulted in her head getting separated from her body.

「If they give their love to me, then I'll hold them tight until their last moment……」

Her wish wasn't to be happy or for her self-destruction. She simply wanted to love and be loved.

The crown prince……the royal brother……the head priest's grandson, she wanted them to offer her their greatest love even if they had to throw away everything that was surrounding them.

That was the only thing that would satisfy the girl's unending "hunger".

But……there was someone who was in the way of that.

The first princess Elena who was gradually becoming the crown prince's political enemy.

The loose cannon who was a fiancée of the crown prince, count's daughter Carla.

The princess's bodyguard who was feared in the underworld, the pink haired girl Aria.

That was why──.

.

「Say, everyone. I think that we all need [Gift].」

.

Around a table inside the sorcery academy were the crown prince Ervan, the royal brother Amor, the head priest's grandson Nathanital. In front of them the girl──"Saintess Licia" was smiling adorably like a child who was begging for a flower.

Side Story: Aria’s Cooking Class

Days of hardships were waiting for Aria and Elena since they were blasted away to the desert of Resvel until they arrived to Cutlass Town.

「Do you often cook Aria?」

Although, for Aria there wasn’t that much hardship despite some bewilderment that she felt from experiencing the desert’s climate for the first time, but she was concerned with Elena’s health because she only had normal stamina even after her body had become healthier.

That kind consideration of Aria became an unexpected hardship for Elena.

Elena casually asked such question to Aria at the first day of their camping. Aria’s answer was──

「I was the one cooking the meal at my master’s place.」

──That.

That night was shocking for Elena who was raised in the palace. Aria suddenly threw something to somewhere, then she pulled it back and caught something like a lizard that was covered in hard scales.

It was pierced by a blade that was shaped like a ship’s anchor. From that Elena realized that Aria used it to hunt the lizard thing, but the next moment Aria suddenly slit the lizard’s neck with her blade and started draining its blood. Elena’s eyes reflexively widened seeing that.

「……W-what are you doing?」

「Draining the blood. It's a waste because blood is also nutritious, but this is my first time cooking this ingredient, so I'm removing its blood just to be safe.」

「No, umm……」

「It's okay, I'll check for poison.」

「Yes……」

Elena faltered when she realized that apparently they were going to eat that creature.

Even someone who was raised in a palace like Elena knew that the meat she usually ate came from living creature. Even so Elena persuaded herself that she would be able to eat it after the animal was dismantled and turned into the usual shape of "meat" that she knew, but she turned speechless when she saw Aria's cooking.

「Aria……?」

「It's not poisonous so it's fine.」

Aria's cooking method was "whole roast". Furthermore she didn't peel the skin or even the scales and roasted the lizard directly over the bonfire completely in its original form.

「This part is tasty.」

「……Thank you for the meal.」

Aria used her knife to cut the neck with a single stroke and recommended the meat there. For the time being Elena averted her eyes so she couldn't see the grilled lizard and bit into the meat.

For some reason she felt resentful that the meat tasted ordinarily delicious.

.

But Elena was made to realize that the meal that day was Aria already being really considerate.

「Ah, Aria……」

There were few living creatures in desert. Proper meat like lizard was very precious.

「I lucked out and found this.」

「Yes……」

She understood that the thing was caught for her sake, so Elena couldn't say anything else than that even if it was a "giant caterpillar".

She was thinking *If at least the thing get dismantled……*while the cooking that Aria produced was a caterpillar that was just cut into two, roasted on fire, and that was it. She handed it to Elena with a spoon stabbed on the cut section. Elena accepted it with a conflicted expression.

By the way she didn't really know how it tasted because she swallowed it without chewing.

Sometimes they would run into a thorny succulent plant in the desert. According to Aria it seemed that the plant had nutrition and also had water content that could be consumed, so Elena thought that it would be fine if she only ate that, but Aria was concerned for Elena's health and hunted creatures with high life force like snake or insect for her.

The snake was still better……or rather it was the really good sort. At the very least she would be able to eat it as mere meat if she peeled the skin and cut it apart.

「I found centipede and scorpion today. Wait for a bit while I remove the poison.」

「……」

Both creatures were as big as Elena's arm. Her sight turned dark as though she got vertigo when she saw the still wriggling arthropods.

After that they finally found a human settlement that was Cutlass Town. It was Elena who rejoiced the most that she even forgot her priority objective.

She got served food that even the bar owner himself said it tasted [bad] in a run-down bar, but Elena could only smile vaguely to cover up her thinking that no matter how bad it tasted it still far better than everything before this.

Though Aria's cooking was tastier, but somehow she felt frustrated to say it out loud.

***

Several months passed and a stampede attacked Cutlass Town.

Elena who got separated from Aria ended up getting saved by Aria's master, a dark elf called Serjura.

While Ron was repairing the damaged hot-air balloon, Elena thought about cooking a simple food in the place of Chako who still hadn't recovered from the mental shock of falling from the sky, but Serjura's eyes widened seeing the ingredients that she prepared.

「Miss……what are you doing?」

「Did I make a mistake? Aria also did it like this though……」

Elena was starting to roast a huge pillbug that was bigger than a human's head that she had found from somewhere. She did it by putting a skewer into the bug and placed it over the fire.

Even Elena didn't think of it as a proper food. Even so because of her innate overseriousness, the idea that cooking during camping was something like this had been instilled into her. She didn't have the slightest intention of eating it herself but, she was doing the cooking earnestly for the sake of Aria's master Serjura.

「……」

Serjura messaged her forehead as though she had a headache after seeing that. She felt like she had even more reason to meet that surly disciple now other than saving her.

「Looks like, I need to have a word with that child……fufufu」

『Gaa……』

Nero looked at Serjura who was muttering such thing with an exasperated gaze. It whined once before falling asleep.

Afterword

For the first time reader, nice to meet you. Long time no see, this is Harunohi Biyori.

The second arc of [academy arc] with few academy scene, [Desert Rose]. Good gracious, the main character finally went away from the academy…….

In exchange (strange as it is to say), the academy arc of the “mock heroine” and “villainess” that was dirty like sludge began.

Carla who could properly use both the orthodox villainess move and slaughter, and Licia who tried to eliminate the villainess by seducing and manipulating the capture targets. It was a battle between these two.

Clara too finally resolved herself and set out to murder Licia directly but……her surrounding was too inhuman that nothing she did worked……. The academy was becoming a location of monster battle with Aria who liked to solve problem with strength and Elena who had common sense absent, but I hoped they did their best somehow.

I think the readers who have read the web novel knew but, Aria’s teleport incident was the game’s hidden route. The capture target was the evil race country’s……who was it again? (pretending ignorance)

In the original hidden route, the heroine who was awakening the capture targets vigorously became considered as dangerous by the evil race and they kidnapped her to the evil race country.

There if the heroine succeeded in conquering the capture target, there would be ceasefire with the evil race country, but there would be a decisive battle with the evil race king if the hidden character’s positivity level was

insufficient. The awakened capture targets would appear at that timing as reinforcement, but if their positivity levels were lacking then the heroine would only have few allies and there was a possibility it would become bad ending.

Well, Aria doesn't need that I guess……. Will the evil race be alright if Serjura, Nero, and Carla joined in?

.

It's Hitaki Yuu-sensei again who is in charge of the illustration this time. Sensei had to draw new designs again than last time, but the result is also wonderful this time. Aria became adorable in volume 5 last time and the capture targets turned into handsome guys of otome game. I think some of you must be surprised by that.

And then this time volume 3 of the manga is also released in the same time period. You readers who might be checking this afterword in a bookstore, let's go to the manga section too. If it's still not sold there you can order it in advance!

The number of volume is increasing and the number of review in the video site and other places are also increasing. I'm relieved because it seems this story is also favorably received there.

Well then, let's meet again at the seventh volume.

My greatest thanks to you readers who are reading this book, the bookstores and stores that give place for this book in their shop, and everyone who is involved with this book's production-!

Extra: One Hundred Years Adventure 3 [Evil Race Woman]

The mountain dwarf Dalton, the human Samantha, the forest elf Miranda.

These strange trio with each having different race became childhood friends, then adventurers, then the dog beastman Fran and the human boy Rook joined their party. After that more than a decade passed.

The five also became adult through that passing of time──

「Yaai, smaaall fry, smaaall fry」

「Gununu」

But around two of them were also unable to completely become adult.

This came about when Samantha became rank 4 when she was twenty years old.

In this world, people would respect those who became rank 2 in their teens, and ordinary person could only reach upper rank 3 even if they spent their whole life for it. Samantha who reached until rank 4 when she was still this young was legitimately a prodigy.

With that naturally the way her surrounding looked at her changed. Naturally Samantha got cocky from that. Greatly so even.

The victim who got agitated like that was the forest elf Miranda.

The forest elf was seen as good looking by human, and had life span that was nearly ten times of human and beastman. They were a race that was

called as forest fairy.

By the way, the elf race's beautiful look was because their frame becoming dainty because of their unbalanced diet for long years, and because their lifespan was needlessly long, they were picky with choosing their marriage partner. Their looks was the result of continuing to do those things for so long, some researchers hypothesized.

In short elf race's aesthetic sense wasn't that different from human race. That was also a cause why half-blood elf was born, and why elf race was haughty despite being country bumpkins, but those didn't matter. The point was that elf's growth in every aspect was slow because of their long lifespan.

Miranda's age too was quite in the mature period based on human's sense, but her appearance was still like a girl in her early teen. She reached rank 3 in that age, so Miranda too was qualified enough to be considered a prodigy based on elf's standard, but perhaps because of their familiarity as childhood friend, Miranda who was usually a snob and like to put on airs against her surrounding fell prey to Samantha's snobbiness this time.

「Annoying」

Gan!

「「──~~~-!」」

Suddenly Samantha and Miranda ate double chop on their head from the backs of steel gauntlets that came from the side. They pressed their hands on their head and crouched down.

「What're you doing Dalton, you violent brute!」

「I'm telling you two don't make a racket at your age!」

The childhood friend of these two, the mountain dwarf Dalton had also grown to look like a twenty years old youth. But, because he was tall for a

dwarf and how he often frowned due to his nature as a worldly-wise man, he strangely appeared like a middle-aged man.

「Look around you! Everyone is put off by you two!」

When they looked at the direction that Dalton pointed at, the other adventurers who were gathering inside the spacious room were staring at the eccentricity of the girls with dumbfounded look. The swordsman Rook and the scout Fran were also mixing in among them, pretending to be stranger.

The two had also turned thirty. Thanks to their high mana capacity their appearance looked like they were at their mid-twenty.

Rook had grown properly since his youth and became a young man, but the dog beastman Fran now showed no trace at all of being a stray street urchin anymore. She had grown tall and beautiful where she had remarkable growth at all the right spots.

「Woof」

Fran still didn't talk with human word much even after getting that kind of appearance, but perhaps because they had known each other for long, the common sense man Rook got what she said and spoke to his "wife" with a troubled look.

「Samantha. Fran also said to not make a ruckus.」

「Chee~~」

Samantha who was holding her head puffed up her cheeks from the words of her "husband".

By the way although they were husband and wife, they didn't marry and also didn't live together. To Rook, he wanted to take responsibility even though it was Samantha who assaulted him, but Samantha seemed to be satisfied with just making a child.

Samantha's appearance almost didn't grow at all since her mid-teen, and her acting like that didn't contrast her appearance, but she was a mother of two children despite appearance.

「……Why am I too」

Miranda was looking tearful from eating a chop to the head with magic steel gauntlet even though she had below average endurance among these people and was a victim who got instigated by Samantha.

.

Their party……it got called as the [Rainbow Sword] referring to each member's overly strong and diverse personality. Right now they were going to an expedition until a foreign country, the United Kingdom of Ganzal.

After Samantha became rank 4, Dalton worked hard to reach rank 4 too in order to quell her reckless action. The "Rainbow Sword" that Dalton was leading was also becoming generally famous as a rank 4 adventurer party.

It was then, at United Kingdom of Ganzal, case of monsters attacking remote settlement at the northwest area was becoming frequent. There were also powerful rank 4 monsters among them so the united kingdom put on request with high reward for high ranked adventurers.

Of course the nation had its own army. But, it was more suited to face head on charge after making preparation. Against monster attacks that happened sporadically, it was highly possible that the army itself would be destroyed if they spread out their soldiers that were only rank 1 or 2 at best.

Ganzal's army and people were gathered at city with rampart and hardened their defense there. But, the number of monster wouldn't decrease like that. The adventurers were suitable in this case where their role was to search and destroy powerful monster with small number.

Dalton's party, "Rainbow Sword" too didn't come until this far to Ganzal where they needed to pass through several other countries first just for the

reward. They wanted to hunt wyvern that from the start could be seen often in this area. This was the result of Samantha and Miranda throwing tantrum.

And then they learned of this quest and thought that perhaps they would also be able to hunt wyvern at the side. It was a godsend so they ended up participating with the search-and-destroy mission.

.

「This area is for us. The villagers are already evacuating, but the people will be troubled if the farmland here get ransacked, and our reward will go down too so put your back into it!!」

「「「Oo~~」」」

「Woof」

Dalton's teammates energetically raised their hand in respond to his words after they arrived at the scene. They were already at the mature age, but the way they easily got into this kind of mood was their good point but also bad point.

They had traveled to their destination that was a farming village with the villagers evacuated.

「Woof」

「Yep, they're here……they're coming!」

The dog beastman Fran sniffed something and urged the rest to be cautious. Miranda who asked wind spirit to search for enemy also supported that and aimed her bow toward a direction. Everyone focused on that direction and from inside the thicket, a swarm of multiple monsters appeared as though they had sniffed out the smell of prey.

「It's lizard man!」

Appearing from the thicket were huge lizards standing on two legs…… lizard men.

They often were thought as monster from their appearance, but their way of being was closer to demihuman species like elf or dwarf rather than beast demihuman like goblin or orc. But, lizard man and human had hostile relationship since the ancient time because of the difference in their ecology and appearance.

There was a reason why lizard man could survive despite being enemy of mankind that surpassed them in statistical parameter.

There was how they had different living habitat, but more than that there was their “strength”. Lizard man had high status parameter from the start and all of them were hunter and warrior. They all would grow into danger level rank 3. Furthermore just like human, if an individual lizard man became warrior full time, they could even grow to reach rank 4 or higher.

But that too was only the case when the battlefield was at “waterside”.

「Do it Samanthaa!!」

「Rooger! Sandstorm──!」

Samantha unleashed level 4 earth magic──Sandstorm before the lizard men could close the distance. The magic swept violently and sand hit the lizard men’s whole body along with their sight, robbing their stamina.

「Rapid shotttt!」

Miranda immediately fired arrows consecutively with absurd vigor. It was a shooting without any decent aiming that only prioritized rapidness. Normally they wouldn’t hit and the target would have easy time to dodge, but the lizard men were clumped together and blinded. And so they were fully hit by those arrows.

But, apparently Miranda thought it was a waste to use expensive arrows for such attack. The number of lizard men who were defeated by Miranda’s attack was few. However, that attack linked to the next move.

「Haa!」

Rook swung his long sword and tore through the lizard man's hard scale.

The lizard men were held back and blinded were all so the vanguards could rush forward before the enemy closed the distance.

The lizard men were distracted by the arrows that flew at them while the sandstorm whittled down their stamina and defense. Rook who was an upper rank 3 swordsman was defeating them one after another in that state.

Even so the lizard men were gradually regaining their sight and surrounded Rook who was charging ahead alone.

「Woof」

But that too was disturbed by Fran who leaped around crushing their eyes with knife while scattering around powdered stimulant, like a jack of all trade. It sent the lizard me into confusion.

However──.

『GIIGIIIII!』

A lizard man that was larger than the rest let out a grating cry and leaped forward. It swung down a weapon that looked like a hatchet toward the two who were in a rampage.

Gakiiin!

「Dalton!」

「Ou!!」

The heavy warrior Dalton used his huge magic steel warhammer to block its attack. Then in respond to Rook's voice he pushed back the large lizard man.

Most likely it was a rank 4 lizard man warrior. The warrior also realized that Dalton was a rank 4 warrior that was equal to himself and its face warped into a laugh.

Rook and Fran started to eliminate the other lizard men who were still in confusion so they wouldn't get in the way of the two warriors. But, this wasn't a duel.

Dalton suddenly lowered his head in panic. The lizard man warrior who was focusing on him was wary but didn't let go of that opening. It leaped forward──in that moment.

GO!!

Its face was smashed by a lump of rock that just barely missed the back of Dalton's head.

「──Rock Brake──」

In that moment, it was Dalton this time who didn't let go of this chance and his Battle Skill bore into the lizard man warrior's rib and internal organs from diagonally below.

「──That was dangerous Samantha!!」

「There's no way it would hit you if it's you Dalton~~」

Dalton yelled his complain while sweating coldly. Samantha who believed that if it was Dalton then he would sense it was cackling loudly.

『……Giiii』

The moment it collapsed, the lizard man warrior vomited out blood while muttering something.

Most likely it was saying something like 『coward』. Dalton guessed that and grimaced, even so he easily spat out his next words.

「Who the hell will risk his comrade's life during work, stupid idiot.」

Dalton was a professional to the end. He became strong because of his sense of responsibility, not because he was a berserker or a martial artist.

But, with the battle between leaders concluded, the battle was inclining toward “Rainbow Sword”.

Samantha and Miranda robbed the enemy’s combat strength from afar while the three vanguards were reducing the number of remaining lizard men.

Perhaps the result would differ if this location was a waterside. But, why did lizard men appear in this kind of place?

That was──.

.

「──Can you stop there?」

Such “voice” flowed into the battlefield. Flame was unleashed in radiating shape at the same time. Fran who was about to finish off a lizard man hurriedly jumped back.

「……Woof」

「Who’s there!?」

Dalton confirmed that Fran wasn’t seriously injured and questioned the identity of the intruder. Then the person in question wearing a hood appeared above an empty’s house roof.

「────!」

That person used a “voice” that they couldn’t really make out and swung their hand. The lizard men who had finally regained their sight started retreating with their injured comrades in tow.

「Wait!」

「──Ice Lance──!」

Miranda quickly fired her arrow at the lizard men, while Samantha fired an ice lance.

「──Air Curtain──」

But, the hood wearing person blocked those attacks with the wind sorcery they unleashed.

「Kuh」

Rook was going to leap forward after seeing that, but──

「Wait Rook!」

Samantha stopped him. As a fellow sorcerer Samantha had seen through that the mysterious person was a sorcerer who equaled or surpassed her.

「Who're you?」

Samantha also asked that question toward the cloak covered person. That person lightly turned their gaze toward the sorcerer Samantha who stopped her comrades……then their eyes stopped on Miranda behind Samantha.

「……Forest elf?」

「W-what……」

Miranda felt awkward and muttered that question because from the person's voice tone, it sounded nostalgic like they were meeting someone who they hadn't met for a long time.

「……fu」

The person in cloak let out a slight snort as though to laugh at the reaction of Samantha and others. They drew out a blade that was curved like a crescent moon from their waist and pointed it to Dalton and the others.

「It'll be troublesome if too many of them die. After all they are our collaborators even like that……. You guys, there are also kids with you. I'll kindly overlook your group if you all withdraw from here.」

It seemed the person in cloak was a female. Her words were clearly referring to Samantha and Miranda.

The next moment──

「……Whooo the hell are you calling stumpyyyy!!」

Samantha suddenly snapped and used her “complaint” to replace activation word and fired countless rock bullets.

「Hee……」

Although it was just a level 2 sorcery, not many sorcerer could fire it in this great number. The cloaked woman leaked out an admiring voice at Samantha’s sorcery, then she diverted the rocks with the wind’s protection around her body and her curved sword, or she dodged using a strange martial art.

「Eee!?」

The average warrior wouldn’t even be able to do such thing. Samantha’s eyes widened seeing such feat.

「──Spirit of wind──」

Even so, aiming the moment the cloaked woman’s feet left the house’s roof, Miranda used wind spirit sorcery and blew away the woman’s body. In that moment──

「Woof!」

Fran leaped to the air with her short sword at the ready. It was unknown whether she was matching the timing or that she had predicted ahead. She swung her blade at the cloaked woman.

Gakin!

There was the sound of metals clashing. Sparks scattered. The woman immediately changed target and met Fran’s attack. Both of them got

repelled from each other. The cloaked woman used the that recoil to return to the roof's edge. Fran who was rolling on the ground jumped back on her feet while pulling out the hidden weapon that stabbed her shoulder.

「Fran-!」

「Woof」

Fran indicated that she was alright in respond to her comrade's yell, even so her eyebrows were lowered weakly from the injury's pain.

And then the cloaked woman…….

「……You guys, aren't bad.」

The cloak's hood was torn and her bare face was exposed.

She looked like she was in her mid-twenty. She was a beautiful woman with sleek silver hair that fluttered in the wind.

But her ears were long like Miranda who was a forest elf. Her skin was lustrous black like glamorous obsidian. Those features──.

「Dark elf!?」

The forest elf Miranda raised her voice the moment she saw the woman's face.

The young dark elf glared, while the dark elf received it with a fearless smile. Dalton gulped when he heard that and stared at the woman.

「"Evil race"……here?」

「It's too bad that you find out. I can't let you guys leave alive anymore now that you have learned my identity.」

Seeing that there was no more need to hold back, intense killing intent radiated from the dark elf toward Dalton and the others. Dalton and the others were sweating coldly not only because of the woman's true identity,

but because they could use Appraisal more accurately on the woman now that her cloak was taken off and her true strength became visible.

Evil race──it was a depreciatory name for dark elf, a race that the holy church designated as mankind's enemy. They were few in number but every single one of them was magic user and warrior. Humans feared them.

「Why's a dark elf in this kind of place……」

「That was really an extraordinary greeting, forest elf missy. Even though we don't even know each other」

The light and dark elves glared at each other again.

「……Do you know about that?」

Dalton kept his gaze and weapon pointed at the dark elf while asking that question. Miranda nodded quietly.

「Yes, I know. It's my first time meeting one but……」

Miranda swallowed her saliva into her dry throat and continued.

「When I lived in the forest, the elder told me the story once……. While we were living in the forest from the start, they were a race that specialized in handling fire and cut down the trees. Because of that there was always a conflict between them and us forest elf, and they were hated by spirits other than the fire, earth, and darkness spirits so they couldn't even obtain the forest's blessing. Because of that even though they're elves they created things like hoe and tilled the farm like smelly dwarf. They farmed things like wheat and baked pan, and then just because they accidentally succeeded they looked down and made fun on us. They are really an unpleasant bunch, the elder said.」

「「「「……」」」」

Torrent of insults flooded out from Miranda's mouth. Just how much grumbling that elder had told to her? Her comrades reflexively took off her gaze from the enemy to look at her.

Those “insults” had been passed down among the forest elves for centuries……or perhaps even millenniums from the era of that parent or grandparent. The dwarf Dalton twisted his lips as though he wanted to say something when Miranda also casually insulted him in the middle of her rant, but the dark elf who was the direct target of that was staring with twitching cheeks.

「Hee……I’ve also heard the story before. How there is some stupid bunch who got called as fairy race by humans and got carried away, so they forced themselves to live deep inside the forest.」

「Haa!?」

Miranda opened her eyes wide at the dark elf woman who was condescendingly making fun of forest elf.

「W-w-what did you say!」

「It’s true isn’t it? You guys mistook yourselves as a noble existence or something, went out of your way to live inside forest where not only there was no grain, you guys didn’t even have any proper tool, so you needed to sharpen animal bones to make sharp thing and live like primitive.」

「E-even dark elf lived in cave like dwarf!」

「……oi」

Dalton who got hit by a stray spark cut in with a low voice, but the enraged Miranda didn’t seem to hear. Miranda too had lived in human town for quite long, and her personality too had greatly mellowed down, but only the person herself didn’t notice that her haughty side would still show up when her emotion heightened up.

Seeing the girl like that, the dark elf woman made a theatrical sigh as though to say “good grief”.

「This is why ignorant country bumpkin is troublesome……. Your friends must also have a really hard time dealing with you.」

「「「「……」」」」

Dalton and others unconsciously turned their gazes at Miranda again.

「Mukiiiii!」

Those gazes made Miranda's face reddened and she fired her arrow.

「Hmph」

The dark elf woman scoffed toward the suddenly shot arrow and dodged by jumping down from the roof.

「There!」

Miranda aimed at the moment the dark elf woman was floating in the air and immediately fired her next arrow.

Forest elves were all hunter who were said to be master archer. As a forest elf herself, Miranda was great at firing rapidly. Her usual accuracy was lacking right now while she was especially furious, but her speed was higher than usual and several arrows assaulted the dark elf woman.

But──

「Wha-!?」

The dark elf woman changed her posture by kicking on the air once more. The arrows were swept away by her flapping cloak. In the end none of the arrows hit her.

「Whyyyy!? Hit already!」

「I'm amazed you can call yourself the hunter of the forest like this. Are you dimwitted?」

Miranda continued firing her arrows that wouldn't hit the target while half-crying. The dark elf woman was dodging them all with only martial art as though to make fun of her.

Originally her comrades should be rendering her assistance, but Miranda's appearance only made her looked like a kid throwing a tantrum. The skilled dark elf was also exuding the atmosphere of "a big sister teasing her young little sister" somewhat, so everyone was only watching in a daze.

And then…….

「Ah, guess it's time.」

「……Ha?」

The dark elf woman muttered. Miranda who was breathing with heaving shoulders asked back in respond. Then the woman shrugged playfully and took distance from her.

「The lizard men should have finished retreating. They'll act as they pleased again if left alone so I can't just ignore them.」

When they realized, that many lizard men had gone completely without any trace. Perhaps they would be able to catch up if they followed the track, but they might get lured into marshland like that and fell into disadvantage.

「Bye. I'll let you guys go just for this time. Think of it as payment for the comical act of the pipsqueak elf over there.」

「Haaa!? Wait! Don't run away!」

「Ahahahahahahah」

The dark elf woman only provoked Miranda for all her worth before leaving without even really harming Dalton and others. She left while laughing.

「Waitttttt!」

Miranda hurriedly tried to shoot her arrow, but she noticed that she had run out of arrow and stomped her feet on the ground angrily like a spoiled kid.

「Mira」

Miranda looked like she was going to chase after the dark elf even if she was alone, so everyone restrained her. Even so she was still really agitated. Rook who was looking a bit pale patted her shoulder.

「That evil race……that peculiar martial art, most likely she……is the [War Demon].」

「……eh」

The evil race's War Demon.

It was the nickname of an evil race member who was said to be a powerful rank 5 magician who was also an expert warrior.

She had slaughtered many enemy commanders by running through the battlefield by her lonesome. She had killed famous knights and adventurers by the dozens on her own. She had a personality that wouldn't even hesitate to hit her own ally with her sorcery, so she was feared by both her enemy and ally because they had to resolve herself for certain death if they met her in the battlefield.

She was a soldier of the evil race army who could also be said as an exceptional being. Countries were offering prize for her death.

Miranda picked a fight with such person on her own and got into an insult match with her, where in the end it was the other side who retreated for some reason. Miranda turned paler than even Rook now that she had calmed down a bit.

「……Could it be, I almost died just now?」

The others nodded wordlessly at Miranda's mutter.

.

The chance meeting of the evil race's "War Demon" and "Rainbow Sword" went like that.

Since then the dark elf woman kept her eyes on Miranda. Even after that Miranda would keep getting teased for all her worth in the battlefield for decades.

Why was Miranda the only one who got let off without getting killed? Nobody knew the answer to that.

The one hundred years adventure of the adventurer party [Rainbow Sword] was still continuing.